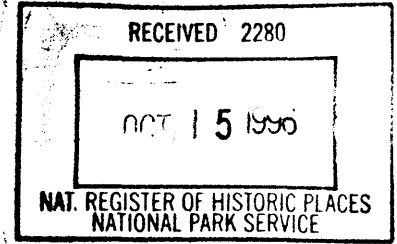


United States Department of the Interior  
 National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
 REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only archival paper (20 pound, acid free paper with a 2% alkaline reserve).

1. Name of Property

historic name Central House Hotel

other names/site number Bodel House; The Boscodel Hotel

2. Location

street & number 1005 Wisconsin Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Boscodel N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Grant code 043 zip code 53805

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		<u>0</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

No. of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

*[Handwritten Signature]*

10/1/96

Signature of certifying official  
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI  
State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet

*Beth Boland*

11/27/96

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register.

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register.

\_\_\_ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date

6. Functions of Use

Historic Functions  
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions  
(enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Hotel

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

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### Materials

(enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone

walls Limestone

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roof Asphalt

other Limestone

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Wood

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Central House hotel has always been one of the most important visual and historic landmarks in downtown Boscobel. This excellent, highly intact Italianate style building was constructed in stages between 1865 and 1873 for Adam Bobel, who owned the building and ran the hotel that occupied it for many years. Located in the heart of the city of Boscobel's historic downtown, this twenty-room hotel building is Boscobel's largest and one of its most intact nineteenth century commercial buildings. The Central House is also Boscobel's best known building because of its status as the birthplace, in 1898, of the internationally renowned Gideon Bible Society. The Central House Hotel building has an "L" plan formed by a smaller rectilinear plan two-story rear wing that is attached at a right angle to a larger rectilinear plan three-story main block whose principal facade faces west onto Wisconsin Avenue, Boscobel's most important historic commercial thoroughfare. The hotel measures approximately 80-feet-wide x 70-feet-deep and it rests on 24-inch-thick walls constructed out of both regular and irregular coursed rubble limestone that enclose a full basement story. The exterior walls that rest on this foundation are constructed out of cut limestone blocks laid up in coursed ashlar fashion on the main facade and uncoursed irregular ashlar blocks on the other elevations, the walls of the first two stories being 18-inches-thick and those of the third story being 12-inches-thick. These walls terminate in short stone parapets that hide the very gently sloping rolled asphalt-covered roofs that shelter the two wings of the hotel. Fortunately, the Central House Hotel is still in largely original condition today, its exterior in particular having retained most of its historic appearance.

The city of Boscobel is located in Grant County on a flat flood plain that is part of the south bank of the Wisconsin River. Boscobel is located approximately 5/8 of a mile southeast of the river bank and the Central House Hotel is one of the most important resources in the downtown, which consists of a fine collection of nineteenth century and early twentieth century commercial buildings that form both the historic and the present commercial core of this small city.<sup>4</sup> The downtown is situated on level land in the heart of the city and comprises the buildings that line both sides of a three-and-a-half-block-long stretch (the 800, 900, 1000 & 1100 blocks) of Wisconsin Avenue, which is 80-feet-wide at this point. Historically, Wisconsin Avenue has been the busiest, most important thoroughfare in Boscobel and it has always been lined with the city's major commercial establishments. These buildings all have main facades that abut the concrete sidewalks and curbs that line Wisconsin Avenue and the only greenery is provided by small trees that have recently been planted along the right-of-way.<sup>5</sup> Most of the buildings are representative examples of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Commercial Vernacular form design and are faced in brick, but the downtown also contains a

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<sup>4</sup> The 1990 population of Boscobel was 2706.

<sup>5</sup> Historic photos show that these blocks were planted with trees only in the late nineteenth century and in the first years of this one.

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fine, largely intact Neo-Classical Revival style library/city hall and there are also several frame construction Boomtown and Front Gable form buildings and several excellent stone-clad Italianate style examples as well, of which the Central House is the largest and tallest. These buildings form a fine ensemble that is immediately recognizable as an historic downtown and the Central House Hotel, which is one of only two three-story historic commercial buildings that front onto Wisconsin Avenue today, is the largest of these buildings and one of the most intact as well.

The Central House occupies the west half of one-and-a-half lots located on the west end of a rectangular city block that is bounded by the north-south running Wisconsin Avenue to the west, Oak Street to the north, Bluff Street to the south, and Valley Street to the east. The main facade of the Central House faces west and fronts on Wisconsin Avenue while its rear elevation faces a gravel-surfaced service alley that bisects the block and runs parallel to Wisconsin Avenue. A small, square, lawn at the rear of the hotel fills the space that is created by the intersection of the two wings and this lawn is bisected by an east-west-running walkway that runs from the main rear door of the hotel to a gravel-topped parking lot that abuts the alleyway and spans the width and depth of the rear portion of the lots belonging to the hotel property.

#### **West-Facing Main Facade (See Attachment A)**

The design of the main facade of the hotel can best be understood by knowing something of how the building we see today evolved. The earliest surviving part of the hotel is the south portion, which was built in 1865, and this was originally a two-story cut stone-clad block measuring 24-feet-wide x 10-feet-deep. The west-facing main facade of this block faced (and still faces) onto Wisconsin Avenue and most of its original design is believed to be still intact today. This consists of a near full-width cast iron first story storefront and four regularly spaced windows in the second story above. The rest of today's facade was constructed in 1873, when a 56-foot-wide x 30-foot-deep three-story block was attached to the original block, creating an "L" plan building. This was done in a manner that permits the west facade of the new block to act as an extension of the facade of the original block; the two facades being in the same plane. At the same time, the original block was raised another story to give the entire west facade of the hotel a uniform three-story appearance.

The asymmetrical main facade we see today thus represents the joining together of the facades of both the original and the later blocks. The portion that is the original facade of the 1865 block consists of the first two stories of the right-hand (south) third of the overall facade. A very fine cast iron storefront that has had its components somewhat rearranged over time occupies the first story. This storefront is inserted into a nearly full-width flat-arched opening and it consists of four bays, the right-hand three being equally wide while the left-hand one is slightly less so. These bays are separated from one another by three identical

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panelled cast iron pilasters that each have bases and capitals and which together support the massive stone lintel that spans the opening. The third bay from the right contains a recessed entrance door opening that has canted sides, each of which consists of a tall, narrow, three-light window unit that is placed above a panelled wood bulkhead. The flat-arched entrance door opening is surmounted by a four-light transom while the door itself is a modern wood one-light unit of compatible design. To the left of the door opening is a six-light display window that is placed above a panelled wood bulkhead while to the right are two nine-light display windows that are also placed above panelled wood bulkheads. All the lights in the storefront are held in place with thin wood muntins while the glazing units are of modern insulated construction.<sup>3</sup>

Flanking the storefront on either side are massive dressed ashlar limestone quoins that once delineated the outer edges of the original facade. These quoins are still intact but the right-hand one now extends upward a full three stories to the building cornice while the left-hand one terminates midway between the second and third stories, which is indicative of the addition of the third story in 1873.

The wall surface above the storefront is clad in regularly coursed ashlar limestone and the second story is four-bays-wide and each bay consists of a round-arched window opening, the two left-hand openings being positioned slightly closer together than the two right-hand ones. Each of these openings has a massive cut stone sill and is surmounted by a dressed stone round-arched head and a keystone. These openings are of equal size and they each contain their original (1881) double hung wood sash six-over-six light windows, the upper sash of which also has a round-arched head.\*

When a third story was added to this facade in 1873, the original cornice of the 1865 block was removed and its wall surface was extended upward to the new cornice level. The new third story was designed so as to be identical to the one below with one exception; each of the four round-arched window openings of this story has both

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<sup>3</sup> A photo of the hotel in the collection of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's Visual and Sound Archives (WH1 (X28) 4155-E, Place File) dated ca.1925 shows that the entrance was then in the second bay from the right while the smaller left-hand bay contained a second entrance door that probably led either to an upper story or to the basement story. In addition, the bulkheads under the display windows then contained four panels rather than the three panels they have now. Thus, it appears likely that today's storefront consists of a superbly executed reconstruction of unknown but recent date that utilized both the original cast iron elements and the original design along with modern glazing and renewed wooden elements, with the storefront elements being slightly rearranged for convenience sake. The resulting reconstruction is expertly done and is in excellent condition.

\* All the original windows in the hotel were replaced with identical units after a disastrous fire in 1881 gutted the hotel.

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a dressed stone surround and a dressed stone head. Otherwise, these openings are identical with the ones below, even to the point of repeating the slightly staggered spacing of the 1865 openings.

The remaining two-thirds of the total length of the two combined facades is made up of the 56-foot-wide west-facing facade of the 1873 block. Important features of its design were clearly inspired by the design of the 1865 block. The wall surface of this facade is also constructed out of regularly coursed ashlar limestone and its three-story-tall left (northwest) corner is delineated with the same massive dressed ashlar limestone quoin blocks that delineate the south corner of the facade. The 1873 facade is six-bays-wide and the first, second, fourth, fifth, and sixth bays from the left each contain a single segmental-arched window opening. Each of these openings features a massive cut stone sill, a dressed stone surround, and a dressed stone head, but the heads (the only ones on this facade) do not have keystones. These openings are all of equal size and they each contain their original (1881) double hung wood sash six-over-six light windows, the upper sash of which has a segmental-arched head. The third bay from the left contains the main entrance to the hotel. This segmental-arched opening is outlined in dressed stone and it is wider than the window openings that flank it on both sides. The opening contains a pair of recessed modern flat-arched one-light varnished wood frame doors that are reached by ascending a single stone step. The jambs of the opening are panelled with wood and a segmental-arched twelve-light transom is placed above the doors.<sup>2</sup>

The six-bay-wide second story of the 1873 facade repeats the fenestration pattern of the first story. Here, though, the entrance opening in the third bay from the left is replaced by a slightly less wide three-centered arch opening that contains an arched two-light transom placed above a recessed pair of one-light flat-arched casement doors that open onto a shallow balcony that offers some protection for the main entrance below. The deck of this balcony is made out of wood and it spans the width of the opening and extends as far as the outer edges of the window openings on either side. A notable feature of the balcony is the elaborate cast iron balustrade that edges it, which is supported by three elaborate cast iron angle brackets. All this metal work (it is believed) date to the 1881 remodeling of the building.<sup>3</sup>

The second story's five remaining bays each contain a single round-arched window opening. Each of these openings is equal in size and they each feature a massive cut stone sill, a dressed stone surround, and a dressed stone head that has a keystone. These openings also each contain their original (1881) double hung wood sash six-over-six light windows, the upper sash of which has a round-arched head.

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<sup>2</sup> At either side of the entrance is a cast iron lion's head light fixture that has a spherical, ribbed, milk-glass globe. These fixtures are not shown in the ca.1925 photo, however, and their date of installation is unknown.

<sup>3</sup> This same balcony is shown on all the existing historic photos of the hotel.

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Identical window openings and windows fill each of the six bays in the third story of the 1873 facade as well and the entire combined facade is now crowned with a plain parapet wall that has reputedly been covered with gray asbestos cement panels topped with wood coping.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a stone plaque bearing the name "A. Bobel" is still located just below the cornice between the fourth and fifth bays from the left.

**South-Facing Side Elevation** (See Attachment B)

The 70-foot-long south-facing elevation of the hotel consists of the two-story south elevation of the 1865 block, across a portion of whose west end a 30-foot-wide third story was added in 1873. This elevation is separated from the front-gabled two-story frame store building next door at 1019 Wisconsin Avenue by a very narrow alleyway that is mostly filled by an exterior wooden staircase that ascends from Wisconsin Avenue to the second story of 1019. Sanborn-Perris maps show that this smaller building predates 1884, and it may in fact be nearly as old as the 1865 block of the hotel. If this is so it may explain why the south elevation of the hotel is practically windowless and has only one opening below the second story.

The corners of this elevation are delineated by massive cut stone quoins and the wall surface in between is clad in limestone rubble that is now largely obscured by later tuckpointing material. The elevation is asymmetrical in design and is five-bays-wide. The first three left-hand bays are each three-stories-tall and the first and second bays from the right each contain just a single window opening located in the third story of each bay. These flat-arched openings each have a dressed stone sill and a massive dressed stone lintel and both openings are filled with their original double hung wood sash six-over-six light windows. The third bay from the left contains identical window openings and windows in both its second and third stories and this three-story part of the elevation is crowned by a sloping parapet wall and by a single thin brick chimney stack.

The remaining (east) portion of this elevation is two-stories-tall and the fourth bay from the left contains a single window opening of the type described above in its second story. The fifth bay from the left has identical window openings in both its first and second stories, although a two-foot-in-diameter metal vent pipe from the first story kitchen extends upward from the upper half of the first story window for several feet. The remaining portion of this elevation has no openings in either story and this two-story part of the total elevation is also crowned by a sloping parapet wall and by two thin brick chimney stacks.

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<sup>7</sup> This facade was originally crowned with an elaborately panelled and bracketed wood cornice that featured thirteen pairs of brackets separating twelve panels. The date of the removal of this feature is not known but it probably happened after World War II. It appears in the ca.1925 photo mentioned in Footnote No. 3.

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**East-Facing Rear Elevation (See Attachment C)**

The design of this complex asymmetrical elevation can also be best understood by understanding the evolution of the building as a whole. The addition of the three-story 1873 block to the 1865 block and the addition of a third story over the west end of the older block created an "L"-plan building whose rear elevation, when viewed from the east, has the appearance of a continuous three-story main block oriented parallel with Wisconsin Avenue to whose left (south) end is attached (at a right angle) a projecting two-story wing (the surviving rear portion of the original 1865 block). However, when the 1873 block was constructed, another slightly lower two-story rectilinear plan 40-foot-deep x 30-foot-wide addition was attached across the entire north wall of the 1865 block (the portion of this wall that remained visible after the 1873 block was constructed) to provide for a new hotel kitchen (first story) and bedrooms for the hotel staff (second story). This resulted in a two-part rear wing measuring 54-feet-wide by 40-feet-deep that is a combination of the taller 1865 block to the left (south) and the shorter 1873 kitchen addition to the right (north). For purposes of convenience, these three elements will be called the 1865 block, the 1873 kitchen addition, and the 1873 hotel block, and each of these elevations is described separately in the following paragraphs.

1865 BLOCK

The northeast and southeast corners of the east-facing elevation of the 1865 block are both delineated by cut stone quoins and the wall surface is clad with small ashlar limestone blocks laid in rough courses that are of differing height. This elevation is three-bays-wide and while the original usage of the three flat-arched first story openings that pierce the wall surface is somewhat conjectural, all three (they are not uniform in height) still retain their original massive dressed stone lintels. The left-hand bay of this story contains a door opening that is now filled with a modern solid door and a transom above that is now filled with wooden ventilator slats. The middle bay consists of a second, slightly less tall door opening that contains a modern two-light door with a small transom above, and the right-hand bay contains an original window opening that has a rock-faced stone sill and that is now partially filled with a later fixed nine-light wood sash window that has a small solid panel filling the remaining space above it.

The second story of this elevation contains two flat-arched window openings that flank a centered flat-arched door opening, all three of which also have massive cut stone lintels. Both window openings contain six-over-six light double hung wood sash while the door opening contains a six-light wood door that opens onto a small balcony that is a part of a metal fire escape that runs diagonally across the face of the elevation. The elevation is terminated by the slightly projecting eave of its gently sloping roof.



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1873 Kitchen Addition

The northeast corner of the east-facing elevation of the 1873 kitchen addition is also delineated by a cut stone quoin and the wall surface of this elevation (which lies in the same plane as that of the attached 1865 block) is also clad with small ashlar limestone blocks laid in rough courses of differing height. This elevation is two feet shorter than the 1865 elevation and it is two-bays-wide and is symmetrical in design. Each of these bays contains a flat-arched window opening in both its first and second stories and all four were originally identical in size and featured a massive dressed stone lintel and a dressed stone sill. The two second story openings are still totally intact and they each contain a three-over-one light double hung wood sash window. The first story opening in the left-hand bay, however, now contains a fixed nine-light wood sash window while the right-hand opening has been mostly blocked with stone and has a window-type air conditioning unit in its upper portion. The elevation is crowned by a simple parapet wall that is surmounted with roughly cut stone coping.

1873 Hotel Block

The entire wall surface of this elevation is clad with small ashlar limestone blocks laid in rough courses of differing height and the three-story-tall northeast corner is decorated with stone quoins. The opposite (southeast) corner of the third story (the portion above the 1865 block) is also delineated by cut stone quoins and the third story wall surface above the older block is three-bays-wide and features a flat-arched window opening that contains a six-over-one light window to the left, a second opening of equal width in the center that contains an old exit door, and a smaller flat-arched window opening to the right.<sup>6</sup> Both of the second and third stories of the remaining (north) portion of this elevation are six-bays-wide and the first story would be as well if the wall surface where its two left-hand bays should be had not been covered by the 1873 addition. The second bay from the left of the first story's four bays contains the principal rear entrance to the hotel. This flat-arched opening is filled with an older but not original four-light over one-panel wood door that is surmounted by a one-light transom. To the right of this door are two tall flat-arched window openings and to the left of the door is another one, each of which has a heavy dressed stone lintel (as does the door opening) and a dressed stone sill. These window openings each contain an original (1881) six-over-six light wood sash double hung window as do the identical window openings in the second and third stories above.<sup>7</sup> The entire third story is crowned by the over-

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<sup>6</sup> The third story of this elevation is nine-bays-wide, the second story is six, and the first story, four. The difference is caused by the placement of the wings at the left end of the elevation.

<sup>7</sup> The only exceptions are the two window openings in the second story above the 1873 block, which, although difficult to see from the ground, appear to be less tall and may be filled with two-over-two light windows.

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hanging eave of the east-sloping main roof, which has an older metal rain gutter placed in front of the original box gutter.

#### North-Facing Side Elevation (See Attachment D)

The combined length of the 70-foot-long north-facing side elevation of the hotel consists of the two-story 40-foot-wide north elevation of the 1873 kitchen addition and the three-story 30-foot-wide north end of the 1873 hotel block. The north elevation of the 1873 hotel block has edges delineated by three-story cut stone quoins and a wall surface that is entirely clad with small ashlar limestone blocks laid in rough courses of differing height. The only opening in this elevation is a single flat-arched window opening centered on the third story. This opening contains a single one-over-one light wood sash double hung window and it appears to be of a later date than the hotel's other openings and was probably placed where it is in order to provide light to a hallway. This three-story part of the total north-facing side elevation is crowned by a sloping parapet wall and by a single thin brick chimney stack. Today, the first story of the north elevation of the 1873 block is hidden from view by the adjacent one-story Barnett & Barnett office building at 1001 Wisconsin Avenue, built ca.1965. Historic photos, though, show that for nearly all of the nineteenth century, both the first and second stories were covered by a two-story frame store building that was demolished early in this century, which may explain why the first two stories have no openings.

The north elevation of the two-story-tall 1873 kitchen addition is asymmetrical in design, four-bays-wide, has a west edge that is delineated with dressed stone quoins, and a wall surface that is clad in small, roughly dressed ashlar limestone blocks laid in courses of varying height. The second bay from the right of the first story's four bays contains the principal outside entrance to the kitchen addition. This flat-arched opening has a massive dressed stone lintel and it contains an older but not original wood door. To the left (east) of this door are two flat-arched window openings and to the right of the door is another one, each of which has a heavy dressed stone lintel and a dressed stone (right) or rough stone sill (the two left openings). These window openings each contain a later nine-light wood sash window that does not quite fill the upper portion of the opening.

The four-bay-wide second story features smaller flat-arched window openings above each of the three first story window openings. These openings each have a dressed cut stone sill and a dressed cut stone lintel, but their original sash have been replaced with three-over-one light wood sash double hung windows in the left-hand bay, the second opening from the left have been filled with wood boards, and the opening in the right-hand bay now contain modern one-over-one light metal sash double hung windows. The second bay from the right (the one above the first story entrance door) now contains an oblong opening that contains a pair of smaller modern one-over-one light metal sash double hung windows, but neither these or the opening itself is original. The elevation is crowned with the overhanging eave of the north-sloping roof that shelters the block.

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**Interior (See Attachments E - H)**

All portions of the hotel are constructed over a full-height basement story with the exception of the 1873 kitchen addition.<sup>10</sup> The basement is unfinished and is currently being used for storage. The perimeter walls of the 1865 block and the 1873 hotel block are of ruddle limestone and are twenty-four-inches thick. In addition, a similar wall, the former north perimeter wall of the 1865 block, is also still intact and is of similar construction.

The basement is accessed via an open staircase in the extreme southeast corner of the building (behind the (current) kitchen). An additional cellar-style stair leads directly from the exterior rear yard down into the basement. The floor joists are clearly visible. The original hotel first floor (the 1873 block) is built upon 2"x12" floor joists that run east-west extending from the east and west foundation walls to a single main beam running north-south. The beam is constructed of four laminated floor joists and is supported by the north and south foundation walls as well as four heavy timber bearing posts. A pair of secondary beams and posts run perpendicular to the main girder, apparently to support the main stairway construction. Two supplementary mechanical jacks have been added for additional bearing support of the hotel's front entry floor.<sup>11</sup>

Floors throughout are of poured concrete over a mud base and appear to have been poured at different times. There is also a later room constructed with concrete block walls that is centered in the basement story and which houses the old boiler room of the hotel.

The first story of the Central House still reflects the additive process by which the building grew. The first story of the 1865 block was originally a simple undifferentiated space occupied by a saloon, but after the hotel addition was built in 1873, the front portion of this space was remodeled as a retail store and the rear portion was partitioned off as Boscodel's post office. By 1892, however, the hotel's restaurant occupied the entire space and this usage has characterized this portion of the first story ever since, although the hotel kitchen and its pantry were moved into the rear portion of the space when the restaurant was reduced in size in recent years.

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<sup>10</sup>1873 kitchen is two-stories

<sup>11</sup> Hubbard, Nancy et al. "Boscodel Hotel Historic Structure Report and Measured Drawings." Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1993, p. 46. Unpublished Mss. prepared by Arch. 660 Class, Historic Preservation Design Studio under the direction of Prof. Hubbard. This fifty-two page document describes the hotel in great detail and should be considered the authoritative source of information regarding the hotel's physical state as of 1993. The cellar-style door is positioned just to the right of the main rear entrance door on the east elevation of the building.

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In 1873, the hotel block and its associated kitchen addition were added across the whole north wall of the 1865 block. The fifty-foot-long x thirty-foot-wide three-story hotel block still retains its historic first story floor plan, which is divided into two main rooms, one to the north and one to the south, that are separated by a full-width entrance/stairhall that spans the depth of the block from east to west. There is also a rear hall to the east of the south room that connects the space in the 1865 block with the stairhall. When the hotel block and its addition were first built, Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance maps show that the north room was used as an office, the south room was used as the hotel restaurant, and the kitchen occupied the first story space in the addition behind. By 1892, however, the north room was in use as the hotel lobby (also sometimes called the parlor), the south room had become the hotel office, and the restaurant occupied whole of the 1865 block. This arrangement persisted for many years, but eventually, the office was moved from the south room into the north room, where it shared space with the parlor, and the south room became a saloon.<sup>42</sup> More recently, the restaurant kitchen was moved to the east end of the 1865 block and the original kitchen space was then converted into a banquet room.

The first story's main stairhall is a rectilinear space that is 13-feet-tall and 30-foot-deep and its principal entrance is placed in the Washington Avenue end of the room. The flooring here is constructed of alternating 3-inch-wide maple and walnut boards that run from east to west and the walls and ceiling are plastered. Tall, possibly original baseboards rim the base of the walls and a decorative plaster molding that features a rich floral pattern that is periodically accented by a raised rosette decoration encircles the edges of the ceiling.<sup>43</sup> The principal feature of the hall is the hotel's original three-story dogleg main staircase, which has a massive paneled octagonal newel post located at the base of the stair, turned balusters, and a molded wood handrail. A partition wall spans the rear of the stairhall behind the staircase and contains a four-light wood door that opens into the rear hall. The other main features of the entrance hall are two large door openings on the north and south walls. These identical openings face each other and provide the principal access into the north and south rooms. Each opening contains a pair of one-light flat-arched wood doors that are flanked by thin sidelights and crowned with a round-arched transom that now contains beautifully executed modern stained glass that has been installed within the last year.

The thirty-foot-deep thirteen-foot-tall rectilinear plan north room also spans the width of the block and it is lit by four windows, two being placed on the east wall

<sup>42</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Fire Insurance Maps of Boscobel, Wisconsin. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1884, 1892, 1899, 1904, 1912, and 1927.

<sup>43</sup> These moldings are not original to the Central House hotel. They were purchased when the Stoddard Hotel in La Crosse (built ca.1903) was demolished in 1982, and installed in the Central House later in the decade. See: La Crosse Tribune, January 17, 1982 for the last days of the Stoddard Hotel.

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facing two more on the west wall. These window openings are eighteen-inches-deep and have paneled wood sides. The floor in this room is also constructed of alternating 3-inch-wide maple and walnut boards that here run from north to south, the walls and ceiling are plastered, tall, possibly original baseboards rim the base of the walls, and more of the decorative plaster molding that was taken from the Stoddard Hotel in La Crosse encircles the edges of this ceiling as well. A simple but elegant modern marble-faced fireplace is centered on the north wall of the room and the room's east end is dominated by a 3-foot-tall wood counter that spans almost the entire width of the room. This counter, while not as old as the hotel, is still thought to be original to the building, and its north end is attached to the north wall and its south end is curved. Behind the desk and inset into the north wall of the room is the hotel's original iron wall safe, which still has the name "Central House" stenciled on it in gold paint. A finishing touch is provided by an elegant multi-branch brass chandelier that hangs from the center of the room's ceiling, this chandelier being a modern reproduction of an eighteenth century original.

The nearly square plan south room is the most completely altered of the hotel's original public rooms. The floor in this room is constructed of alternating 3-inch-wide maple and walnut boards that run from north to south and the walls and ceiling are plastered. Here, though, the original walls are nearly completely covered by 8.75-foot-tall wood paneling that probably dates from the mid-twentieth century, and take boxed beams cross the ceiling. Occupying nearly half the room is a large cloverleaf-shaped late Art Moderne style bar that is attached to the east wall. The base of this wooden bar is covered in a wood veneer and a portion of the bar's countertop lifts up to allow the bartenders access to the inner portion, where a central island that is also attached to the room's east wall bears the cash register.

There are two doors in the east wall of the south room and both open into the rectangular plan rear hall, which runs behind the entire east end of the south room. This thirteen-foot-tall hallway has an unvarnished wood floor made up of wide board and it has plaster walls and a plaster ceiling. The base of these walls is rimmed with tall, simple baseboards, and more of the Stoddard Hotel's decorative plaster molding edges the ceiling. A door opening at the north end of this hallway opens into the rear of the main stairhall and a second door opening at the south end opens into the large room that occupies most of the first story of the 1865 block.

More than half of the space that was originally the first story of the 1865 block is now given over to a room that until recently served as the hotel's restaurant. This very plain room has an unvarnished board floor, plaster walls whose lowest portion is covered by three-foot-tall wood wainscot (this is not original to the room), and a plaster ceiling. There are no decorative moldings affixed to the ceiling of this room nor is there any other type of ornamentation. The west wall of this room is given over almost entirely to the cast iron storefront described earlier and the windows in this wall provides most of the room's natural light.

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The second story of the hotel is accessed by the main stairs and it consists of an "L"-shaped corridor whose longest portion runs north-south above the 1873 block and whose shorter portion runs east-west above the 1865 block. At the juncture where these portions meet, the walls curve rather than come to a corner and a now disused telephone niche is set into the curved portion of the wall. The floors of these corridors are constructed out of unvarnished wide wooden boards and most of the corridor's wall and ceiling surfaces are plastered. Guest rooms and bathrooms are located along both sides of the corridors, those on the west side overlooking Wisconsin Avenue. All of these rooms have now been altered, some considerably, the only one that is in something like its original state being the Gideon Room, which occupies the southwest corner of the floor. The original wood flooring and the baseboards of this room are still intact and a cast iron radiator is positioned on the south wall. The room also contains a simple chair rail and its two round-arched window openings are enframed with broad flat-arched surrounds as well, but it is not certain that these last two features are original. A large commemorative glass plaque that is affixed to the south wall of this room has text painted on it that commemorates the meeting here that resulted in the formation of the Gideon Bible Society in 1898 (see Section 8).

The third story of the hotel is also accessed by the main stairs and it consists of a corridor that runs north-south above the 1873 block. Here too, guest rooms (twelve) line the corridor but both the corridor and the rooms have now been stripped of all of their original features.

#### Condition

The exterior of the Central House is still in surprisingly original condition today considering the building's age and history, and most of its important historic features are still intact. As noted earlier, nearly all of the hotel's original 1881 windows are still intact, most notably, the ones on both the east and west elevations of the 1873 hotel block, and these contribute greatly to the retention of the hotel's original appearance. The most significant alteration to the exterior has been the removal of the tall wooden cornice that once crowned the main facade, although the existence of many good historic photographs of the hotel would enable this feature to be restored with considerable accuracy.

The interior of the hotel has suffered more from age and subsequent alterations than the exterior. This process started in 1881, when a major fire gutted the building and left only a few of the structural timbers intact. The subsequent rebuilding of the interior may have resulted in some changes to the original floor plan, but the general disposition of the most important of the original first story rooms that resulted from this rebuilding is believed to be still largely intact.<sup>14</sup> This story is

<sup>14</sup> Such features of the historic interior of the building as are still intact date from this time.

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also in the best condition of the four today since the 1980s restoration effort focused primarily on this story. But, while many of the original features of this story have survived, the numerous alterations described earlier have somewhat compromised its integrity. The upper floors, however, are in much worse condition, both structurally and aesthetically. Many of the original rooms have been altered, new rooms have been created, new door openings have been opened in many of the walls, bathrooms have been added, and much of the original fixtures and trim have been lost. In addition, general deterioration and water damage is evident throughout these stories.

Reversing these problems will require a major restoration effort and it is this future effort that the writing of this nomination is intended to aid.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  X  nationally   statewide   locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  X  A   B  X  C   D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)   A   B   C   D   E   F   G

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Architecture	1865-1873 <sup>+5</sup>	1881 <sup>+6</sup>
Commerce	1873-1945 <sup>+7</sup>	
Social History	1898 <sup>+8</sup>	

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person	Architect/Builder
N/A	Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Central House Hotel is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under National Register (NR) criteria A and C. More specifically, it is being nominated because of its associations with the significance areas of Commerce and Architecture, both of which are themes identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP), and also because of its association with the significance area of Social History. Research initially centered on the Italianate subsection of the Architectural Styles section of the Architecture Study Unit of the CRMP.<sup>+5</sup> The results of this research shows that the Central House is locally significant under NR criterion C as a fine and unusually intact Italianate style hotel building. The original portion of the Hotel was constructed for Adam Bobel in 1865, to house a saloon. In 1873, however, Bobel added a three-story hotel addition and kitchen wing to the original building, creating the 20-room building that is the subject of this nomination. The size and three-story height of this building made it the largest commercial building in Boscobel during the nineteenth century and it continues to be an important visual landmark in the community today.

<sup>+5</sup> The period of significance for architecture spans the years from the date of construction of the oldest portion in 1865, through 1873, when the construction of the hotel addition gave the building its present form.

<sup>+6</sup> This date (1881) marks the year in which a major fire destroyed the entire interior of the hotel, leaving the exterior walls intact but little else. The interior of the hotel was then rebuilt within the same year.

<sup>+7</sup> The period of significance for Commerce spans the years during which the Central House was operated as Boscobel's premier hotel. The hotel operation began in 1873 and the year 1945 reflects the date mandated by the NPS's 50 year rule.

<sup>+8</sup> This is the year in which a meeting between two men who were guests at the hotel resulted in the founding of the Gideon Bible Society, whose donated bibles are now to be found in hotel rooms and other places around the world.

<sup>+9</sup> Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. Madison: State Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986. Vol. 2, p. 2-6 (Architecture).



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The Central House is also of local significance under NK criterion A because it has historically been the largest, the best known, and the most important of the hotels built in Boscobel before World War II and it is thus the culmination and the only intact surviving example of a commercial theme that has been significant in Boscobel's historic past. The Central House hotel is also believed to be of national significance under NK criterion A in the area of Social History as well, because of its having been the birthplace in 1898 of the Gideons International Society, which, since its founding, has distributed hundreds of millions of free Bibles for placement in hotel rooms around the world, becoming an American icon in the process.

#### Historic Context

Like so many of Wisconsin's earlier communities, Boscobel owes its existence to proximity to a river, in this case, the Wisconsin River. The first Euro-American settler in the Boscobel area was Thomas Sanders, who came from Galena, Illinois, in 1846, and lived in a hut located on what is now Block 6 of the original plat. Sanders was soon thereafter joined by a man named Wood and together they salvaged logs and ratted them down river. Other settlers soon followed and by the early 1850s, numerous farms had been established on the shallow flatlands bordering the Grant County shore of the river. Even as late as 1854, however, the actual site of the future community of Boscobel was being tilled by a farmer named Joshua Brindley.

The land on which the city was located was bought in 1854 by C. K. Dean, Adam E. Kay, and John Mortimer. The first-named, afterwards a prominent citizen of the place, was then a civil engineer employed by the Milwaukee & Mississippi (now the St. Paul) railroad. The village was surveyed in 1856 by John Mortimer, and named Boscobel. The original plat was afterwards enlarged by Parker's, Brown's, Brindley's, and Watkins's additions. Late in the fall of 1856 the railroad was completed to the village and the building of the town began in earnest. Previous to this, however, in 1855, Dr. Panchard, Horace Watkins, and Moors Rice settled in the place; John Ruka put up a blacksmith shop just west of the site of Dr. Carley's residence; James Dickerson put up a frame building and opened a store. Dr. J. O. Beals, the first permanent physician, came in 1856. In 1857 Dr. D. W. Carley came in and engaged in practice. In 1857 Dwight D. Parker came in and established the extensive store of Parker, Hildenbrand & Co.<sup>40</sup>

By the beginning of the Civil War, Boscobel had acquired the things necessary for growth; a sawmill and flouring mill to serve the surrounding farms, and a railroad to ship goods into and out of the area.

In the year 1864, village honors were conferred upon the thriving burg by the legislature, a charter being granted at that time. The population at this time

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<sup>40</sup> Holford, Castello N. History of Grant County, Wisconsin. Lancaster, WI: The Teller Print, 1900, pp. 663-664.

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numbered about 1200. When the return of peace brought back to the village many of the men whose place for four years had been at the front, the village took on a sudden and well-sustained pride on the road of commercial prosperity. The years 1867 to 1870 brought many improvements in the way of business and buildings. In fact, most of the buildings on Wisconsin Avenue (in 1881) date back to those years. The panic years of 1873-77 were felt, with their depressing effects in Boscobel. Yet, without flinching, Boscobel went sturdily forward with the construction of a bridge across the Wisconsin River, which was to cost, as time rolled on, the sum of \$45,000. In order to enable them to do this, the citizens petitioned the legislature for a city charter, which was accorded them by the legislature in 1873, the act bearing the date March 15.<sup>21</sup>

A number of the earliest buildings in the downtown portion of Boscobel (including the Central House Hotel) date from this period, and with the creation of the bridge (non-extant), Boscobel settled into another period of sustained, if gradual, growth.

Incorporated in 1873, Boscobel thrived as a center for agricultural trade. Ideally situated between Dubuque, Madison, and La Crosse, it was a gathering point for crops produced in the surrounding countryside. Economic disaster did not visit Boscobel in the Depression years. While panic struck elsewhere, the Boscobel State Bank weathered the storm without closing. In 1935, the population stood at 2500. Retail establishments prospered. Through the 1950s, farm and retail trade remained strong. Residents recall the weekly festivities that took place on Saturday nights, says Ralph Goldsmith, publisher of the Boscobel Dial who came to town in 1956. Farm families would come to Boscobel to do their weekly shopping and, in the process, Wisconsin Avenue was taken over by friends stopping to talk. The life-style was characterized as easy going and rural.<sup>22</sup>

Since then, however, the decline of the rural farming population in the area has had a negative impact on the economic life of Boscobel and the community is now searching for a new role to play as it enters the next century of its existence.

#### Commerce

The Goods and Services Study Unit of the Commerce Theme of the CRMP which will discuss Wisconsin hotels has not yet been published. In its absence, no statewide overview of hotels as a resource type currently exists. Even so, hotels and other places where short-term lodging could be rented constitute one of the more widespread of all resource types and can be found in settlements of every size and in every part of the state. Their presence has been noted in every Intensive Survey of

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<sup>21</sup> History of Grant County, Wisconsin. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881, pp. 785-786.

<sup>22</sup> Community Report Wisconsin. July 1992, p. 23.

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community resources so far undertaken in Wisconsin and even a casual perusal of published Wisconsin county histories shows that virtually every community has at one time or another had a building which offered rental lodgings. Even a community setting is not a necessity as the State Historical Society's Old Wade House Historic Site (NRHP, 10-26-71) in Sheboygan County demonstrates.

The earliest examples of hotels in Wisconsin were frequently among the first buildings in their respective settlements and owed their existence to the scarcity of available dwelling places in those days and to the necessity of providing shelter for transients and for new arrivals. This need usually resulted in the erection of a makeshift building whose rough-and-ready mode of construction often revealed the limitations of available labor and materials. The earliest examples were often of log construction and have seldom survived. The next generation of hotels followed quickly on the heels of these pioneer structures and were usually of frame construction.

Typically, once a community reached this stage of its development, its future growth became its first priority and further progress in constructing newer and larger hotels often depended on the ability of the community to generate enough traffic to warrant the expense of such construction. The coming of the railroad was often the catalyst which generated this traffic. Railroads were looked upon by towns of that period as an almost magical agency which could insure future prosperity. Not surprisingly, then, railroads acquired a symbolic importance as well since a community which was on a rail line was felt to be a permanent one, a critical distinction in attracting outside capital for growth. So great was this desire for permanency that citizens willingly bought the stock of the railroad, mortgaged farms, donated land for right of ways, and did all in their power to ensure the coming of this transforming agent.

The development of hotels in Boscobel followed the pattern set forth above. The railroad came to Boscobel in 1856 when the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad first reached the new community and the development of the community's first hotel promptly followed.

The first institution having for its avowed object the sustenance of the inner man was opened by one Curtis, in the year 1856. The site of this first hotel was the second story of a warehouse building put up by Florence Liscum that year. The lower floor was meant for ordinary warehouse purposes. This for the time being was the only "hotel" of which the new settlement could boast, and continued to furnish food to the hungry and rest to the weary traveler for some six months, when "mine host" Curtis retired to the walks of private life. Succeeding this crude attempt came the Barnett House in the latter part of 1856; where, under the regime of "Andy" Barnett, most genial of landlords, the stranger was taken in and cared for in a manner that soon raised the reputation

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of this caravansary to the highest rounds of the ladder of famous country inns. In April, 1858, this house caught fire, and, despite all exertions, burned to the ground. For the time being, the Philbrick House, occupying the building still standing (non-extant) on the corner of Wisconsin avenue and La Belle street, and kept by a widow lady of the above name, caught the diverted channel of boarders and guests who had formerly made the "Barnett" their headquarters, and did a thriving business until the completion of the new building, erected upon the ruins of the burned hotel. The new structure was somewhat enlarged in size and was opened again in 1859 by Mr. Barnett & Son, the latter selling out to Mr. John Pepper. They disposed of it, after a short time, to other parties the business finally falling into the hands of Mr. James Barnett, under whose regime the "Barnett" acquired a reputation that was State rather than local. After Mr. Barnett's retirement, the caravansary passed through different hands until it finally came under the supervision of Mr. Carrier, by whom the building was raised and one story added underneath, the name at the same time being changed to the "Carrier House," by which appellation it was known for many years. The house is at present in the hands of Mrs. A. J. Betts and ranks among the first of Boscobel's hotels.<sup>23</sup>

Several other small frame hotels were also built in the downtown during the 1850s and 1860s, however, including: the City Hotel, located just to the north of the intersection of the railroad tracks and Wisconsin Avenue on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue; a hotel situated on the southeast corner of Wisconsin Avenue and East Bluff streets (ca. 1103 Wisconsin Avenue, located two blocks south of the Central House) run by J. J. Button; and another hotel that was located almost across East Bluff Street from Mr. Button's hotel (ca. 103 East Bluff Street).<sup>24</sup> More hotels were to follow. By the 1870s, two hotels more had been started in the downtown area of Boscobel as well. One was the Muffley House hotel at 102 West Oak Street (known later as the Trautman Hotel and still later as the Johnson Hotel) while the other was the Wisconsin House hotel. The Muffley House is now gone, but the two-story stone portion of the Wisconsin House is still extant, although in altered condition, and is located at ca. 813 Wisconsin Avenue.<sup>25</sup> Other early hotels may also have existed in Boscobel besides the ones listed above. For instance, an article in a Lancaster, Wisconsin, newspaper dated 1873 noted that Frank Muffley (who later established the Muffley House hotel mentioned above) was then the proprietor of the

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<sup>23</sup> History of Grant County, Wisconsin. Op. Cit., p. 789. This hotel was located at 833 Wisconsin Avenue and historic photos show that it was a handsome three-story sidegabled clapboard-sided Greek Revival style building. Subsequently, this hotel was renamed "The Betts House" and still later the "Grant Hotel" and it survived into the mid-1900s, but was later razed and its site is now a parking lot.

<sup>24</sup> New Map of Grant County, Wisconsin. Pedro Mayer & Co., NY: 1868. None of these hotels are now extant; Button's hotel building was gone by 1884 and the City Hotel was razed between 1912 and 1927.

<sup>25</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Op. Cit., 1884, 1892, 1899, 1904, 1912, and 1927.

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Carrier House and that "Among the hotels of the place [Boscobel] is the Smalley House, John Smalley proprietor; the Wisconsin House, J. D. Pfeisterer, proprietor, and the Muscoda House, M. Meyer, proprietor. Each house has all the custom they can attend to and almost nightly they are so crowded that farmers are compelled to seek accommodations elsewhere."<sup>46</sup> Of these three hotels, only the location of the Wisconsin House is known for certain.

Despite the presence of several other smaller hotels in Boscobel in early 1873, however, it is clear that the Carrier House was then Boscobel's leading hotel, which was an important distinction at the time. While hotels were first and foremost commercial ventures, they also served other, less tangible community needs as well. The appellation "leading hotel" was a material distinction in a day when a community's hotels were an important measure of community status. First time visitors (including the much sought-after venture capitalists of the day) often formed their initial opinion of a community from its hotels.<sup>47</sup> Better hotels were thought to produce a more favorable impression on the outsider and were thus considered to have a strong, if indirect, link with community prosperity. Communities that were large enough to be able to distinguish between their hotels and could designate one or more as "leading hotels" were believed to have superior resources with which to sell themselves. Lesser hotels might represent the reality of a town's current economic status, but "leading hotels" represented a town's aspirations as well and were a sign to outsiders that they were in a wide-awake community with a future. Thus, "leading hotels" were often invested with a symbolic importance not so different from that given to railroads and such institutions became a coveted sign of prosperity.

Never-the-less, if the Carrier House was Boscobel's leading hotel in the first months of 1873, it was also just about its oldest as well, which suggested a business opportunity for anyone looking to build a new, more up-to-date institution in this boom period of Boscobel's history. This was typical of building patterns of that day. Once a community had established a hotel infrastructure of the type described above, with a leading hotel and several smaller ones, subsequent hotel building activity was usually a matter of adding such new hotels as population increases warranted and of replacing older structures that had become outmoded. As communities matured, evolving community standards usually dictated brick or other "fireproof" construction for new hotels just as they did for other commercial buildings built in the second half of the nineteenth century. This process was already well under way on Boscobel's Wisconsin Avenue in 1873, which was to see many of its pioneer frame construction commercial buildings replaced with larger stone-clad ones in the 1870s.

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<sup>46</sup> The Democrat. Lancaster, Wisconsin, February 10, 1873, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Mollenhoff, David V., Madison: A History of the Formative Years. Dubuque, Iowa, 1982, pp. 26-31, 33-34, 49, 60, 132, 290.

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The man who would build the building that was to house Boscobel's leading hotel until it finally closed its doors in the 1970s was Adam Bobel. Bobel (1834-1885) was born in the village of Maden, in Prussia, in 1834, and was a weaver by trade, work which he followed until he emigrated to the United States in 1853. Bobel "settled in Ohio, where he lived a number of years before removing to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At the latter place he was married, March 3rd, 1855, to Miss Elizabeth Dagenhart and after a residence there of eight years he came to Boscobel with his wife and young family and has resided here ever since, for a period of 23 years. Of that time one year was spent in Idaho and eighteen months in the (Union) army, as sutler with the 20th Wis. Vol."<sup>20</sup> In 1865, Bobel constructed the two-story stone building that is now the south portion of the Central House Hotel with a Mr. Schaffter at a cost of \$5000.00 for use as a saloon. "In about six months time after it (the building) was finished Mr. Bobel purchased his partner's interest and ran the business alone."<sup>21</sup> In 1873, Bobel, who had in the meantime turned the second story of his building into a hotel called the Bobel House, decided to greatly expand the existing building into an up-to-date first class hotel which he intended should become the leading hotel in his adopted city. By December of 1873 his newly renamed three-story stone hotel building was open for business and a new advertisement in the local paper noted that "This favorite resort (a billiard hall) for "knights of the road" located in the new stone Hotel building--the "Central House,"--has been thoroughly renovated and refitted and is admitted by all to be the best in the city."<sup>22</sup> The new hotel was managed by James Barnett, late of the Carrier House, "who continued as landlord for the succeeding five years, when Mr. Bobel himself took the house, and ran it until January 7, 1881, when it was destroyed by fire, the interior being gutted and only the huge stone walls having been left standing. With an energy deserving of the highest commendation, Mr. Bobel immediately set to work clearing the debris preparatory to rebuilding. The new Central was completed by spring (of 1881), and re-opened after being returned and refitted in the most approved style."<sup>23</sup> Bobel continued to run the hotel until his death in 1885, by which time the Central House was one of the most noted hotels in southwest Wisconsin.

Many other owners were to run the Central House in subsequent years and the general leveling off of Boscobel's population growth after the 1880s effectively guaranteed that no one would build a new hotel that could supplant it as the city's most important hotel. Thanks to continuous good management, the hotel retained its preeminent position in the city and the surrounding area and it continued to be the logical place for visiting dignitaries in the area to stay, among whom were John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, who stayed at the hotel when Kennedy was campaigning for president in the area in 1960. Gradually, though, the age of the hotel and

<sup>20</sup> Boscobel Dial. June 16, 1885, p. 3. (Obituary of Adam Bobel).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. January 14, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. December 26, 1873, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> History of Grant County, Wisconsin. Op. Cit., pp. 790-791.

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competition from newer, more up-to-date motels on nearby USH 61 brought the hotel operation to an end and the building now stands vacant while its owners look for a new role for it to play. In the meantime, though, all the other buildings in Boscobel that once served as hotels save only a portion of the old Wisconsin House have now been demolished. Consequently, the Central House hotel is now the sole remaining intact example of the historic hotels that once flourished in Boscobel.

The Central House hotel is thus considered to be of local significance to the area of commerce because of its preeminent status as Boscobel's leading hotel throughout the period of significance, a period that encompasses most of Boscobel's history as well. Hotels were highly important economic and social institutions in nineteenth century Wisconsin and were of great practical and symbolic importance to the communities in which they were located. The Central House, by virtue of both its size and its reputation, has always been Boscobel's leading hotel and its presence has allowed the city to play host to numerous important personages over the years who might otherwise have bypassed this small city. In addition, the highly intact state of preservation of the hotel permits it to continue to accurately portray its historic role in the community.

#### Social History

The Central House is best known today for being the site of the historic meeting that led to the founding of a major American social institution; the Gideons International Society. Consequently, the hotel is believed to be of national significance in the development of the social history of the nation. The following history of this event and of the Gideons was provided by Prof. Nancy Hubbard of UW-Milwaukee and it is an outgrowth of the class effort she led that resulted in the Historic Structures Report referred to earlier.

Historically, the Central House hotel is significant as the location of the formation of what has since become the Gideons International Society, an organization which developed out of reform movements by commercial travelers at the end of the 19th century. The Gideons were and are a nondenominational, non-profit organization whose work receives all its funding from members and local churches. The society has continued in operation for almost one hundred years with its primary activity being the worldwide distribution of Bibles to hotel rooms; the presence of a Gideon Bible is now a standard feature of the American travel experience.

The Gideons Society was one of several professional organizations of salesmen which emerged after the American Civil War in an attempt to bring stability and respectability to commercial travel. These organizations were not uniform in their activities. Some were fraternal organizations, promoting social relationships among commercial travelers. Others were mutual aid societies, some of which provided insurance plans for their members. Several of the groups worked for professional unity among commercial travelers, protesting discrimination in licensing laws,

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working for travel discounts, agitating for better hotel service, and providing a forum for discussion of common business problems encountered by members. All of these groups were essentially reform organizations which shared the "discourse of Protestant evangelism" with other reform movements of the late 19th century. The Gideons concentrated on improving the religious standards of commercial travelers in an effort to reshape the commercial world according to Christian standards.<sup>24</sup>

In September, 1898, John H. Nicholson, a traveling salesman from Janesville, WI, attempted to check into the Central House, but as no single rooms were available, the hotel manager asked him to share a room with another salesman, Samuel E. Hill of Beloit, WI. During their stay at the hotel, the two men discussed the need for an organization of commercial travelers that would provide "mutual help and recognition for Christian travelers." In late May, 1899, the two men met again and formalized their decision to form such an organization. The two were joined by another salesman, W. J. Knights of Janesville in the first formal meeting of the organization at the YMCA in Janesville (extant- 402 West Milwaukee St.) in July, 1899. The organization formally was called the Christian Commercial Travelers' Association of America with its object being the fellowship of "Christian traveling-men of the world." Although the first organizational meeting took place at the YMCA in Janesville in 1899, the Gideons have always identified the Central House hotel as the location of its founding.<sup>25</sup>

At the 18th annual meeting of the organization in 1917, the members approved the appointment of a committee to consider making Room 19 of the Central House a "permanent Gideon room." This project was completed in May, 1921, when the Gideons' president placed a plaque and photographs of Hill and Nicholson in the room, noting in his presentation that the hotel was "where the Association was first conceived" to distinguish it from the Janesville YMCA "where the Association was born."<sup>26</sup>

The organization experienced relatively slow growth in its first years, and had severe organizational problems in 1905 and 1906, resulting in its reorganization and shift in its activities. At the 8th annual convention in July, 1907, a proposal to furnish a Bible for every hotel room in the United States was approved unanimously by the membership, becoming the group's primary activity. The concept of placing Bibles in hotels was first introduced at the Gideons' first annual meeting in 1900 in Waukegan, IL, although the emphasis was more on working to have a Bible available in every hotel at the hotel's expense than on providing Bibles.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Spears, Timothy B. 100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 155, 163, 166-167.

<sup>25</sup> Gideons International. Twenty-Two Years' History of the Gideons: 1899-1921. Chicago: The Christian Commercial Travelers' Association National Headquarters, 1921, pp. 11-12, 24, 154, 167.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 154, 167.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21, 87-93, 99.



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Other organizations, particularly the American Bible Society, had been active in the distribution of Bibles in the last quarter of the 19th century. The American Bible Society was a nonsectarian, nondenominational, benevolent society which had been founded in 1872 to provide Bibles to immigrants, destitute families, schools, prisons, military personnel, and hotels. Its emphasis was more on mass distribution than on the placement of Bibles in hotels, however. When the Gideons shifted the organization's focus to Bible distribution, the American Bible Society cooperated with them in the project based on its already well-established methods of distribution and its ability to publish Bibles inexpensively. The Gideons' emphasis on placing Bibles in hotels was unique in the United States. The activity had been undertaken in England by the English Commercial Travelers Christian Association for a number of years. The English association, however, had been furnishing only a few Bibles to hotel offices. The Gideon's much larger goal was to place a Bible in every hotel room in the country.<sup>36</sup>

In the first year of its Bible distribution (1908-1909), the Gideons placed almost 5800 Bibles in the United States, most of which were in hotels in the upper Midwest, reflecting the regional identity of the organization's early members. As the idea caught on, though, the number of Bibles distributed began to grow almost exponentially. By 1920, the Gideons were placing 50,000 Bibles a year in the nation's hotel rooms and had distributed 459,264 Bibles in America alone while newly formed sister organizations in other countries such as Canada and England had begun to place Bibles in the hotel rooms of those countries as well. By the beginning of World War II, Gideon Bibles had become a ubiquitous part of the American travel experience. The end of the war saw the organization become truly international in its scope. By 1985, over 360 million Bibles had been distributed worldwide since the organization's founding and one million Gideon Bibles were being distributed worldwide every 15 days by 85,000 Gideons working in 134 countries. So well known were these Bibles that they were even mentioned in a Beatles song called "Rocky Raccoon." By early 1995, the Gideons International Society had distributed over 600 million Bibles. The Bibles have been translated into 76 languages and distributed in motels, hotels, hospitals, and prisons in 171 countries.<sup>37</sup>

The Central House hotel is closely associated with the founding of the Gideons and this association has been recognized and honored, both by the Gideons themselves and by others. It is therefore believed that this association is of national significance in the area of Social History as a result. The importance of the Gideons to the area of Social History as one of the most successful and long-lived of the organizations that arose out of the Christian reform movement that developed

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<sup>36</sup> Gideons International. Twenty-Two Years' History of the Gideons: 1899-1921. Op. Cit., pp. 99, 105.

<sup>37</sup> Ehler, Bob. "Where the Gideons Began." Minneapolis Star-Tribune. November 10, 1985, Sunday Magazine, p. 20. Recent statistics provided by Wendell McClinton (spokesman), Gideons International Society, March 27, 1995.

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developed in the United States during the late 19th century is well known. From its modest beginnings in Boscobel and in Janesville, the Gideons have grown into an international organization whose name is familiar even to those who are unfamiliar with the organization itself and the Bibles distributed by this organization are now familiar to every American traveler. The Central House is now generally recognized today as the most important physical resource associated with the early days of this organization.

### Architecture

The Central House hotel is also believed to be of local significance to the area of architecture as an excellent and largely intact example of Italianate style design as applied to an urban hotel building. This significance is further enhanced by the high degree of integrity that the building displays.

Boscobel's downtown developed along both sides of Wisconsin Avenue south of the railroad tracks that cross it at an angle near Superior Street and the Central House hotel is positioned in the center of this concentration of buildings. These buildings are collectively of significance architecturally as a fine group of approximately thirty-two nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings that for the most part are representative examples of Commercial Vernacular form, Italianate style, Twentieth Century Commercial style and Boomtown form design. Of these buildings, the Italianate style examples are especially noteworthy since they date from the period of the city's greatest prosperity and are thus both the largest historic buildings in the downtown and the most elaborate as well. The Dwight Parker Building (1100 Wisconsin Avenue); the Fred Scheinplug Building (1869, 1026 Wisconsin Avenue); the John & Louis Ruka Buildings (ca.1872-1876, 1012-1022 Wisconsin Avenue); McSpaden's Block (1867, 835 Wisconsin Avenue); and the Central House Hotel (1003 Wisconsin Avenue); are the best examples of the style in the downtown, but there are also seven lesser examples of the style in the downtown and several others also utilize salient elements such as the semi-circular-arched window openings that are especially associated with the Italianate style in Boscobel.

The Italianate style subsection of the CRMP notes that the period during which buildings designed in this style appear in Wisconsin spans the years from 1850 -1880 and it describes the commercial manifestations of the style as follows:

Italianate references typically found are the bracketed cornice, which often rises above a flat or shed roof, and at the windows (which frequently have hoodmolds or even pediments and sometimes are roundheaded). Nearly every Wisconsin city and village has its examples, often surviving in near original form in upper-story wood, stone, or iron hoodmolds, brackets and cornices.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *OD. Cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 2-6 (Architecture).

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Even without the massive panelled and bracketed cornice that originally spanned the width of its main facade, the Central House is still recognizable as an excellent representative of Italianate design. The original two-story portion of today's building was constructed in 1865 and consists of a stone-clad main facade whose first story is given over to a full-width cast iron storefront while its second story features three round-arched window openings enframed in stone that have keystones. Both stories still survive today as part of the enlarged facade that dates from 1873. The round-arched windows of the Central House in particular are an Italianate style motif that appears on each of the other Italianate style buildings mentioned above as well, all of which have stone facades and all of which were constructed within the same six-year period. These buildings were an impressive sight when they all still retained their original features and they still are even now, but the three-story height, the unusually wide main facade, and generally high level of integrity of the Central House makes it stand out from the others.

Unfortunately, no newspaper existed in Boscobel in 1865, when the original portion of the hotel was constructed and the local newspapers covering the months in 1873, when the hotel addition was being built have not survived. Consequently, no information has been found that identifies the original designer and/or contractors of either portion of the completed building. Fortunately, though, the story of the hotel's evolution is contained in an account of the fire of 1881.

In 1865, Mr. Bobel, in company with Mr. Schaffer, built the south portion of the hotel as a saloon, putting on a second story which was roomed off for accommodation of the wooden structure which stood on the north. The building thus erected was 24x70 and cost the firm \$5000. In about six months after it was finished Mr. Bobel purchased his partner's interest and ran the business alone. In 1873 Mr. Bobel sold the wooden structure, which was moved away, and built on to the saloon an addition 56x30 feet, three stories high and extended the 3rd (sic) story over the saloon building. He also built a wing, two stories high, on the rear of the new part, 40x30 feet, the lower story of which was for kitchen purposes, the upper story being divided off into sleeping rooms for the hired help. The hotel when completed was rented to Mr. James Barnett, who managed it until 1877 when his lease expired. During the summer of that year Mr. Bobel concluded to manage the hotel in person, and thoroughly refitted the house with new furniture. Since that time he has continued as the landlord of the most popular hotel in this section of the State, having his rooms fully occupied most of the time.<sup>29</sup>

The fire of January 7, 1881, however, completely gutted the building, leaving only the walls standing and the city without "the handsomest and best built hotel in southwestern Wisconsin."<sup>30</sup> Fortunately for Boscobel, Bobel decided to rebuild and

<sup>29</sup> Boscobel Dial. January 14, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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immediately set to work to make the hotel an even better institution than it had been before. . By January 28, the structural timbers had been put back in place, by February 18, the roof joists had been positioned, and by February 25, the roof had been replaced, new windows and doors installed, and the building was enclosed.<sup>\*1</sup> The work on the interior then commenced and on May 13, 1881, the local paper announced that the project was completed.

Four months ago the Central House in this city was destroyed by fire, nothing remaining of the main building except the bare and blackened walls. Today the building stands completed, a pride to the city and an honor to its proprietor, Mr. Adam Bobel. Many important changes have been made and all for the better running of the house. The lower stories are returned throughout, new carpets, bedding, and furniture. Every room is supplied with a transom that is always under the control of the occupant. He [Mr. Bobel] has employed first class workmen in all departments. Mr. George Benn of Lancaster was the master carpenter. Mr. Anthony Sweeny of Lancaster, the boss mason, and Mr. Frank Chesebro, of Muscoda has had entire charge of the inside decorations. He has shown himself equally as skillful in his business as has Messrs. Benn and Sweeny. As now completed, for beauty of finish, comfortable rooms, and general convenience, the Central House takes rank with the best hotels in the country.<sup>\*2</sup>

Remarkably, much of the work from this period still remains in place today and the exterior of the hotel especially, is still in its largely original 1881 state. Time has taken its toll, however, and the Historic Structure Report recently written about the hotel makes it clear that there is a pressing need for a major, thoughtful restoration of the building, a need that this nomination is intended to further. Indeed, so great is the statewide concern about the future of this building that the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation made special mention of the hotel and its current situation in their June/July newsletter in 1992.

The Central House Hotel, then, is being nominated for its local significance in the area of architecture as one of the most important and most intact examples of Italianate architecture in Boscobel. Italianate style commercial buildings were among the first commercial buildings to appear in large numbers in Wisconsin downtowns. Boscobel's downtown was no exception and it still contains a surprising number of impressive stone-clad examples. Even within this fine group of Italianate style commercial buildings, however, the Central House building stands out. The Central House exhibits most of the design features that are typically associated with the style and even without its original bracketed cornice the facade of the hotel is clearly Italianate in design. In particular, its design makes considerable

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<sup>\*1</sup> Ibid. January 21; January 28; February 4; February 18; February 25; March 11, 1881. For each see p. 3.

<sup>\*2</sup> Boscobel Dial. May 13, 1881, p. 3.

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use of round-arched windows, a window type that was a popular early feature of this style elsewhere in Wisconsin and in Boscobel in particular. The significance of the hotel is further enhanced by its very intact original exterior.

Owner:

The Boscobel Heritage Museum, Inc.  
1312 Wisconsin Avenue  
Boscobel, WI 53805

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Community Report Wisconsin. July 1992.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

X See continuation sheet

- 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

Specify repository:

Nomination Preparer

10. Geographical Data

Acraege of property Less then one acre

UTM References

A	<u>1/5</u>	<u>6/8/6/6/2/5</u>	<u>4/1/1/8/0/8/0</u>	B	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting		Northing		

C	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	D	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the land associated with the Central House Hotel is: South 27.25 feet of Lot 5, and all of Lot 6, Block 46, Original Plat, City of Boscobel.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

These boundaries enclose all the land historically associated with the hotel.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy F. Hegglund / Consultant  
 for: The Boscobel Hotel Preservation Committee  
 organization 1312 Wisconsin Ave., Boscobel date June 15, 1995

street & number 1311 Morrison Street telephone (608) 251-9450

city or town Madison state Wisconsin zip code 53703

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Items a-d are the same for each photo

Photo 1

- a) Central House Hotel Building
- b) Boscobel, Grant County, Wisconsin
- c) Timothy F. Heggland, April 14, 1995
- d) State Historical Society of Wisconsin
- e) Angle View of Hotel facade, facing NNE
- f) Photo 1 of 13

Photo 2

- e) Main facade, facing E
- f) Photo 2 of 13

Photo 3

- e) Main facade, detail of storefront, facing E
- f) Photo 3 of 13

Photo 4

- e) Main facade, main entrance, facing E
- f) Photo 4 of 13

Photo 5

- e) Kitchen wing, facing S
- f) Photo 5 of 13

Photo 6

- e) Rear elevation, facing W
- f) Photo 6 of 13

Photo 7

- e) Rear elevation and south elevation, facing WNW
- f) Photo 7 of 13

Photo 8

- e) Interior, first story stairhall, facing E
- f) Photo 8 of 13

Photo 9

- e) Interior, parlor/office, facing W
- f) Photo 9 of 13

Photo 10

- e) Interior, detail of safe in office wall, facing N
- f) Photo 10 of 13

Photo 11

- e) Interior, saloon, facing SE
- f) Photo 11 of 13

Photo 12

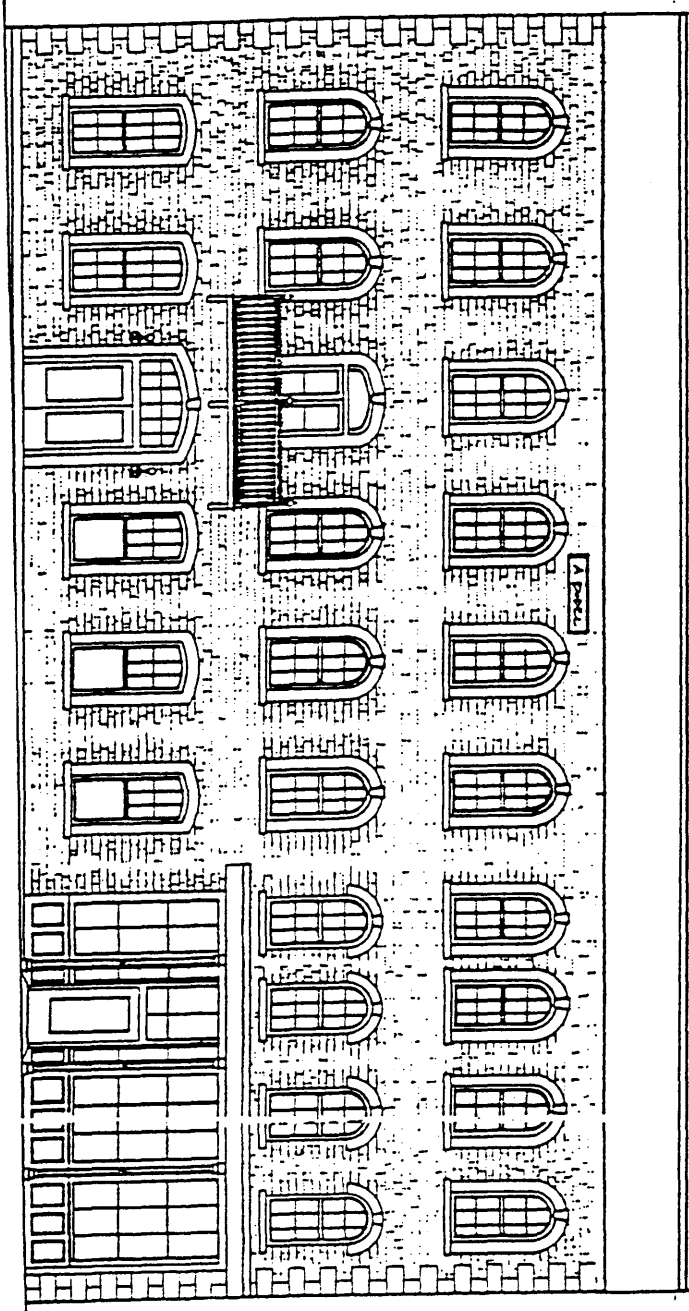
- e) Interior, rear hall, facing N
- f) Photo 12 of 13

Photo 13

- e) Interior, restaurant, facing W
- f) Photo 13 of 13



WEST ELEVATION



SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



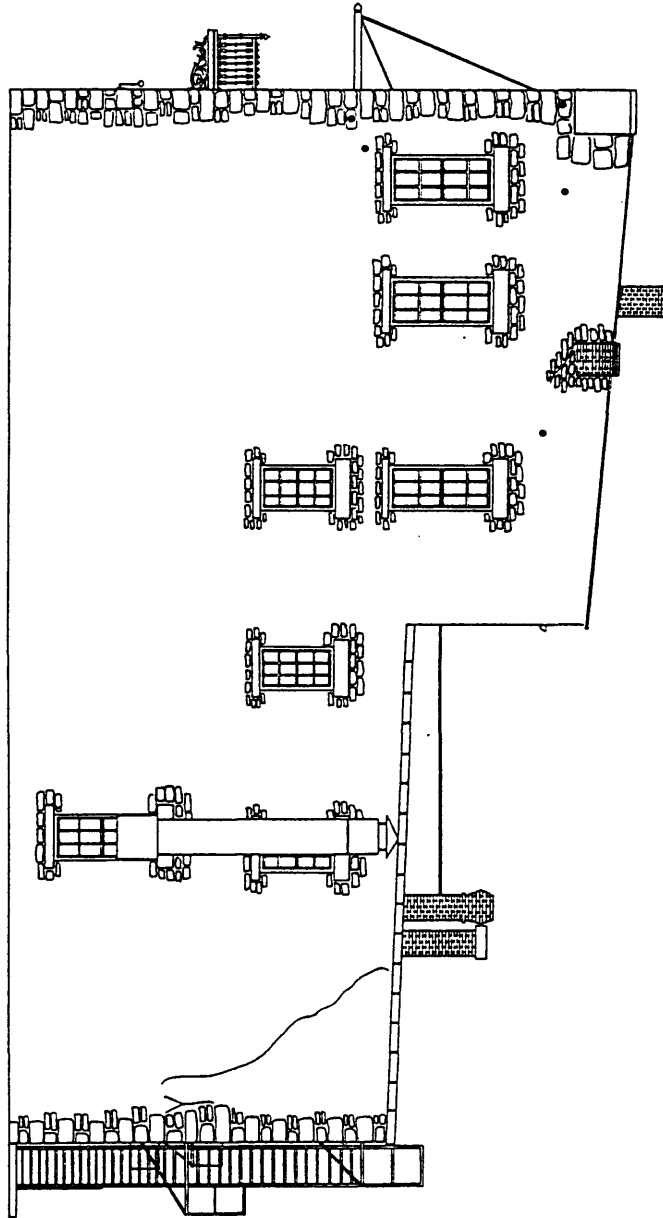
GRANT COUNTY

STUDIO 681  
 UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MILWAUKEE  
 MAY 1, 1993

HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
 BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED  
 DRAWING

SOUTH ELEVATION  
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



GRANT COUNTY

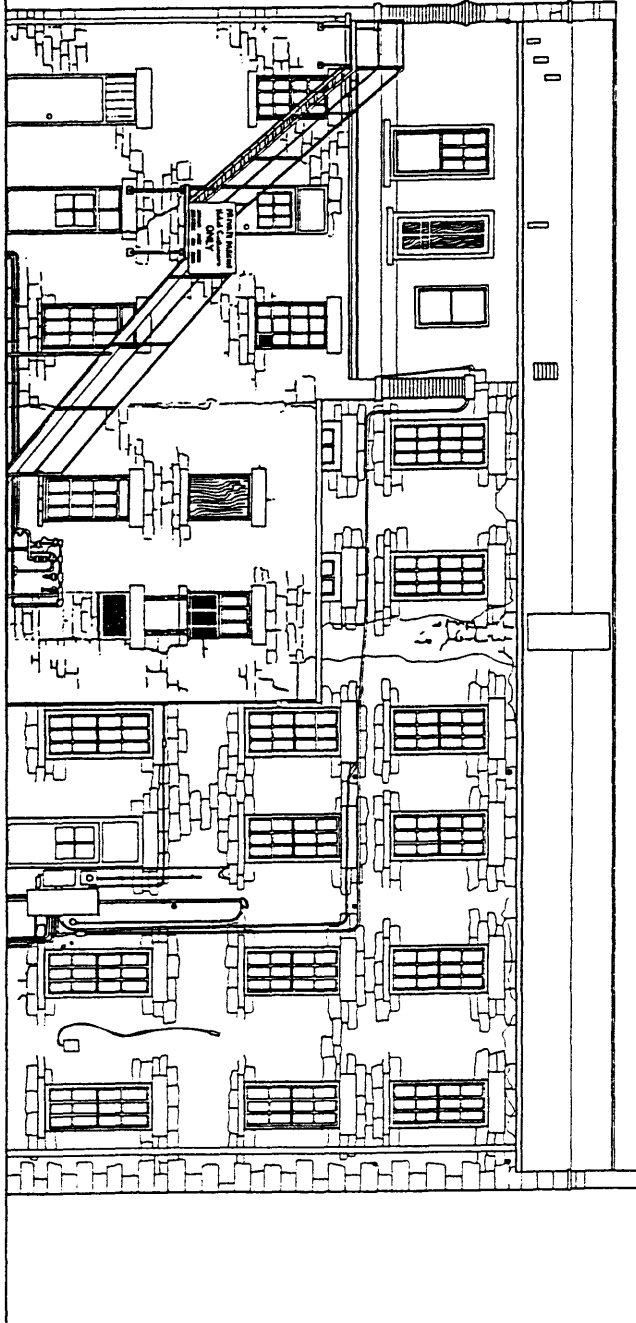
STUDIO 681  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MILWAUKEE  
MAY 8, 1993

HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS  
DRAWN BY: *[Signature]*

EAST ELEVATION

SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



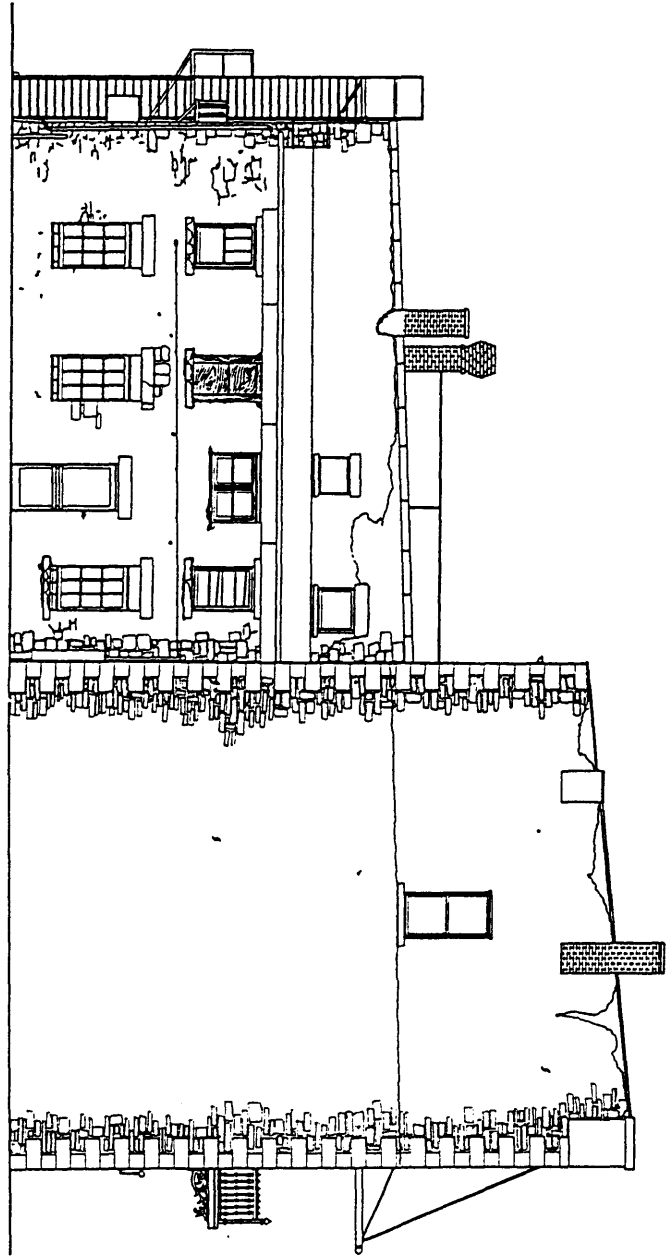
GRANT COUNTY

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MILWAUKEE  
MAY 8, 1993

HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS  
PAUL WHITEHACK  
DRAWN BY: MEGAN LANCINA

NORTH ELEVATION



GRANT COUNTY

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MAY 8, 1993

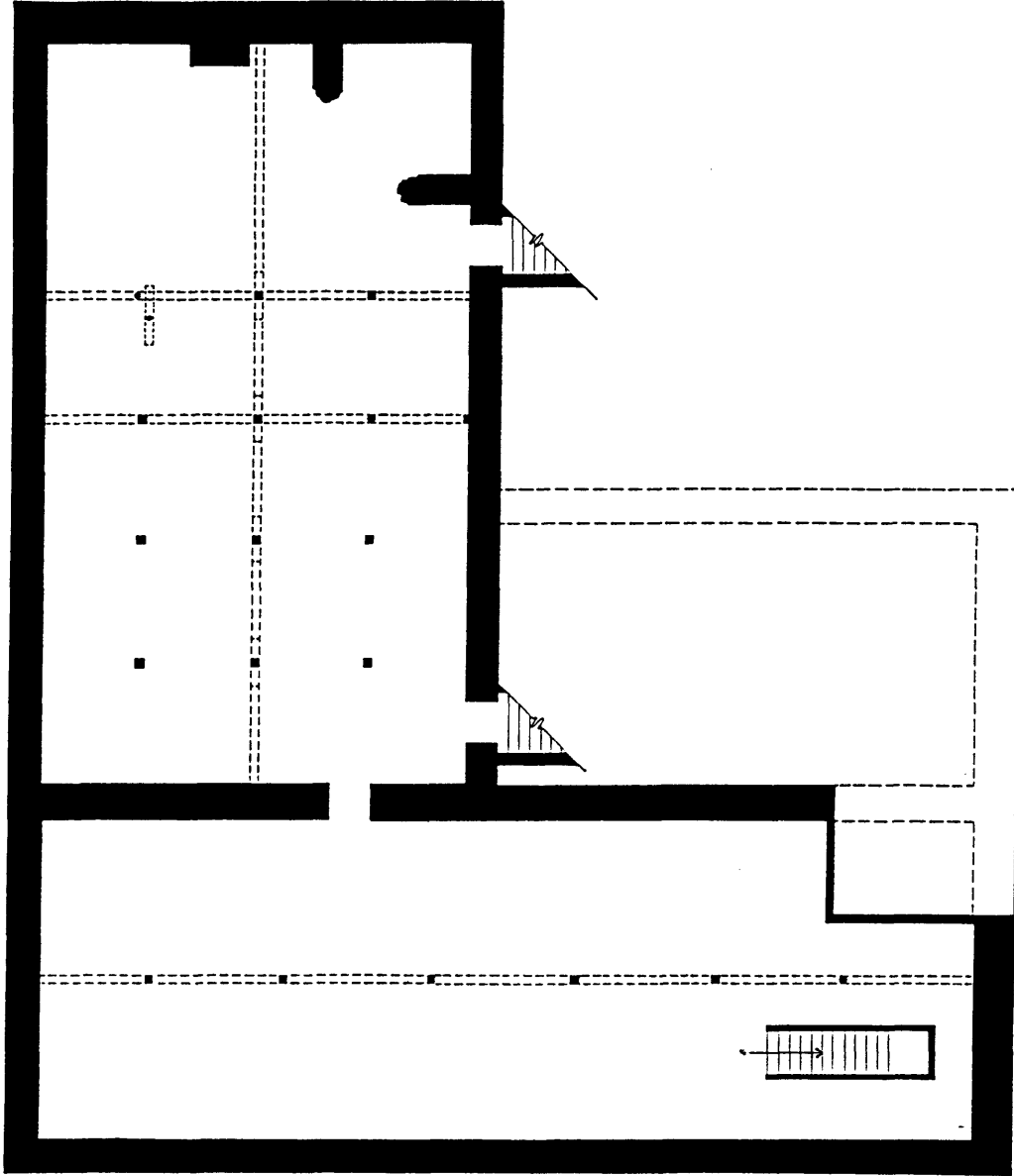
HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS

DRAWN BY: *Smill, J. N. 1/10*

BASEMENT PLAN

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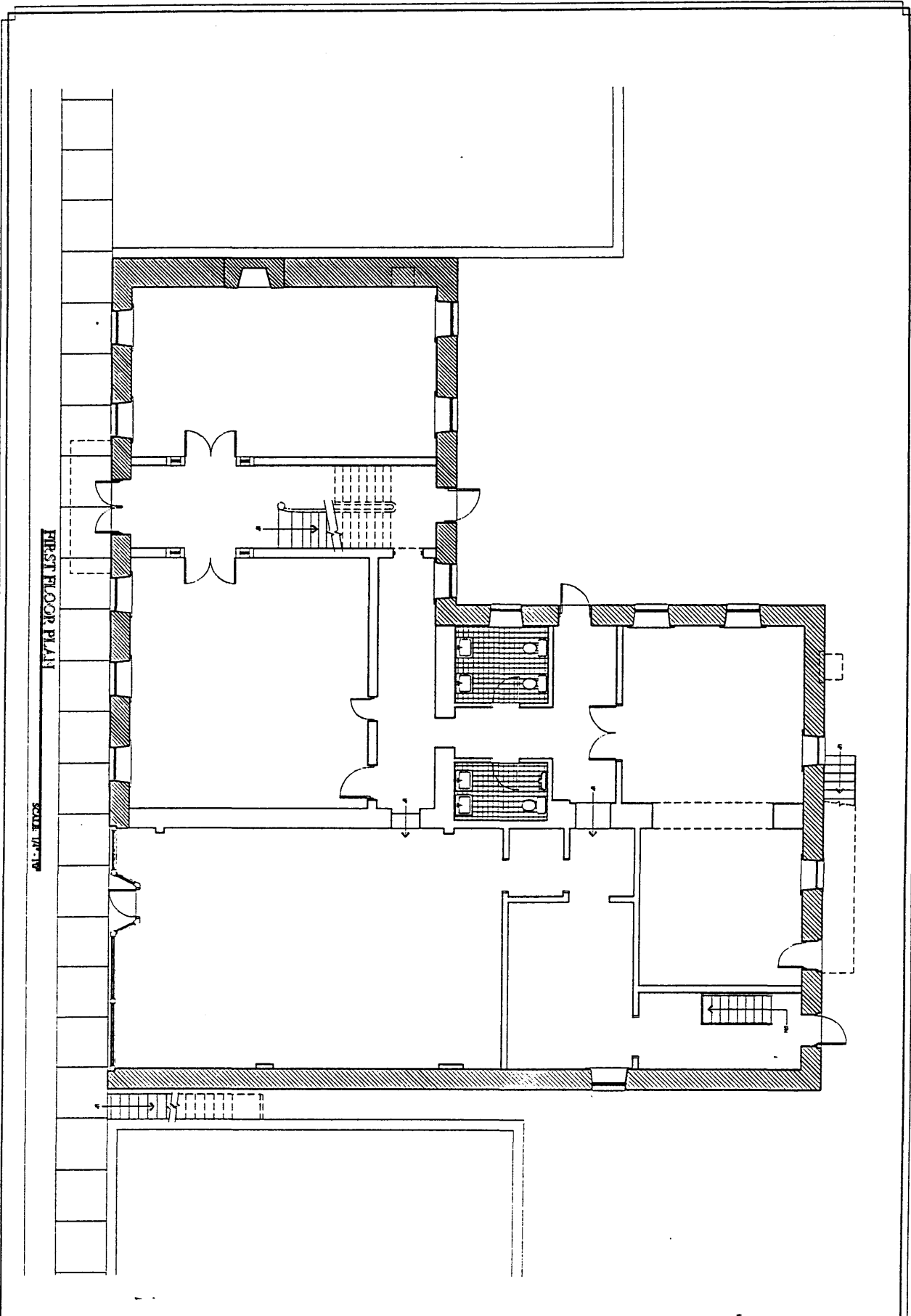


GRANT COUNTY

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MAY 8, 1993

HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS  
DRAWN BY: PAUL WHITENACK



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

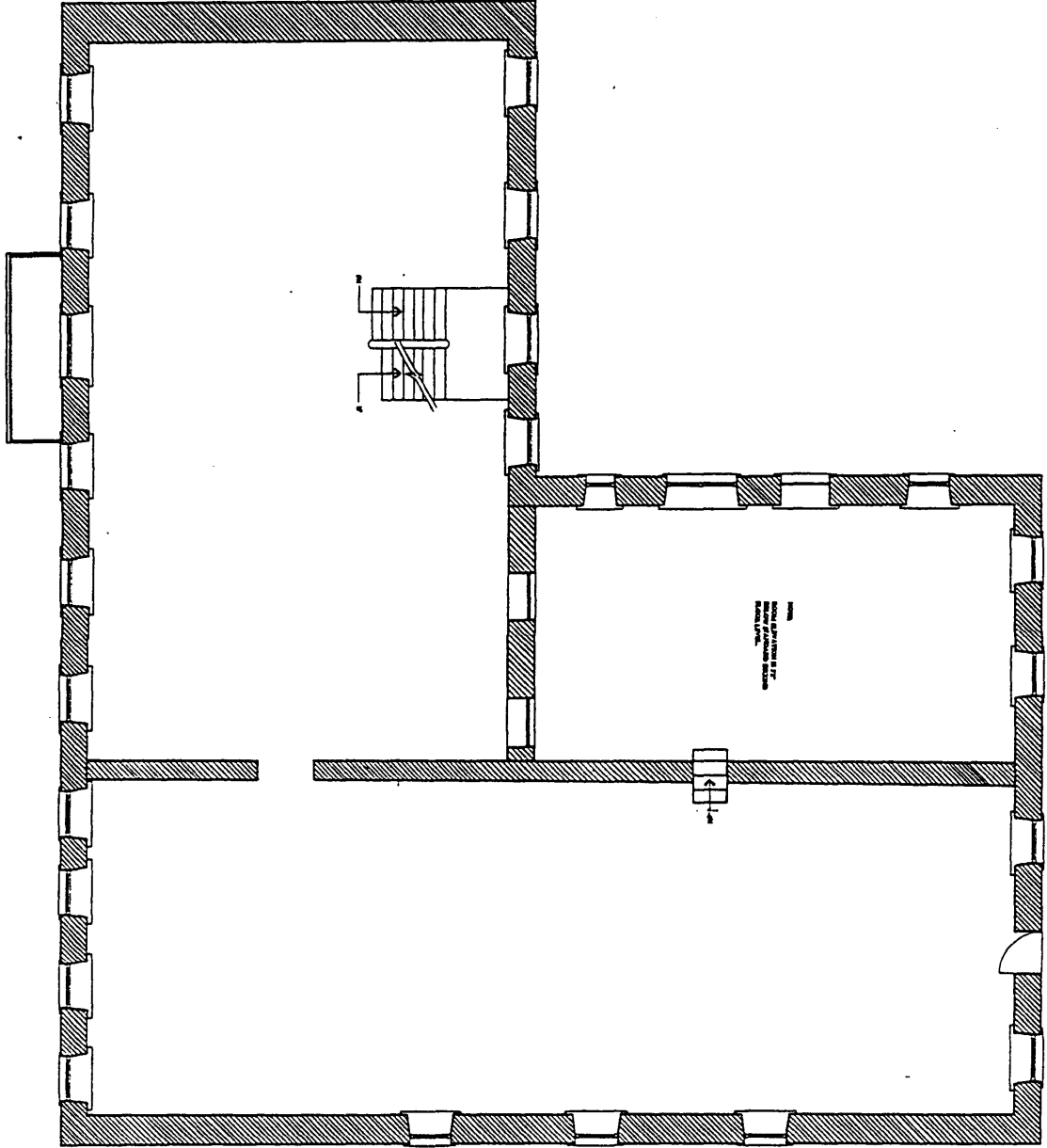
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MAY 8, 1993

GRANT COUNTY  
**HOTEL BOSCOBEL**  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS  
DRAWN BY:

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



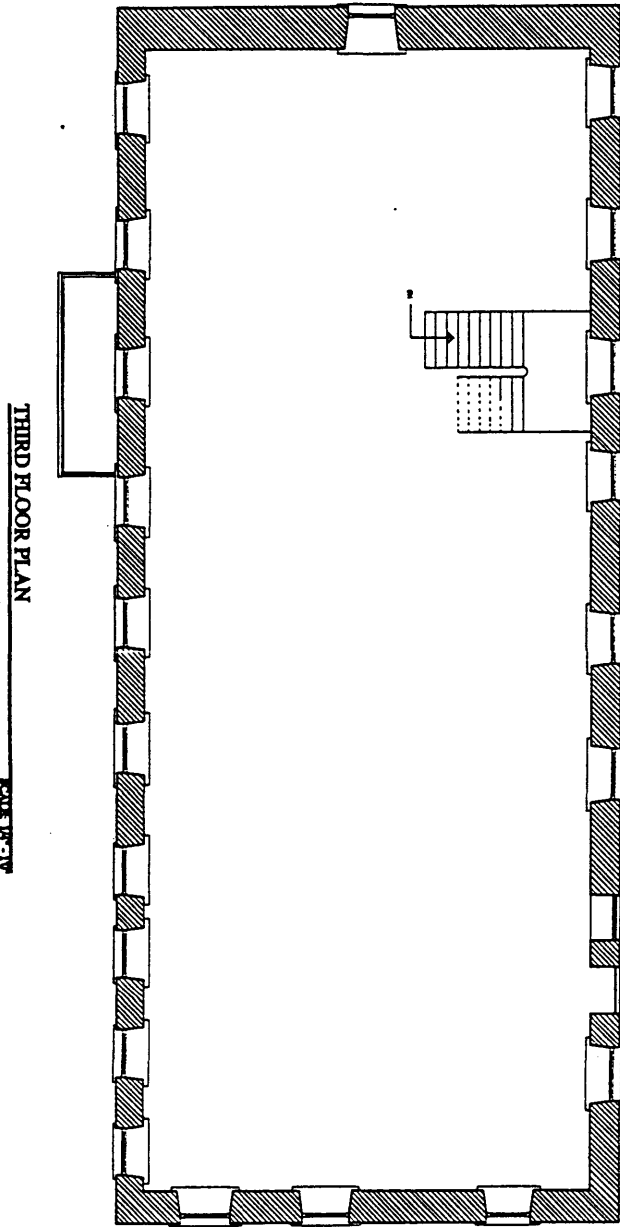
GRANT COUNTY

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 MAY 8, 1993

**HOTEL BOSCOBEL**  
 BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS

DRAWN BY: *W. Schack*



GRANT COUNTY

STUDIO 681  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MILWAUKEE  
MAY 8, 1993

HOTEL BOSCOBEL  
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

MEASURED DRAWINGS  
DRAWN BY: *Kathy Schaad*