

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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



1. Name

historic John Michael Kohler House

and/or common John Michael Kohler Arts Center

2. Location

street & number 608 New York Avenue ^{Ave.} not for publication

city, town Sheboygan n/a vicinity of congressional district sixth

state Wisconsin code 55 county Sheboygan code 117

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition N/A	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Sheboygan Arts Foundation, Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 489, 608 New York Avenue

city, town Sheboygan n/a vicinity of state WI 53081

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Sheboygan County Courthouse

street & number 615 North Sixth Street

city, town Sheboygan state WI 53081

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (continued)

title Wisc. Inventory of Hist. Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state WI 53706

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

General Description

The John Michael Kohler house is a two story cream brick late Victorian Italian Villa style residence which was significantly remodeled in the 1920s. The house faces south on a corner lot in the heart of Sheboygan. Grounds landscaping is substantially as it was after the remodeling. Connected to the rear of the house and to the house's historic carriage house (altered) is a modern cream colored brick building which contains the John Michael Kohler Arts Center galleries, theater, classrooms, and museum. This modern building was sited and designed in a sympathetic way and therefore constitutes a minimal intrusion to the appearance of the historic house. Although it is included in the nominated property, the modern building is not significant to the nomination. The use of the historic house as offices and galleries for the arts center is sympathetic to its historic character.

Original House

The house is a two story brick veneered structure on a coursed limestone foundation capped with an iron water table. Plan and massing are asymmetrical with projecting pavilions on all facades. The east facing pavilion contains a two story bay. The roofline is gently pitched and had projecting gables with heavy eaves and cornices and with returns suggestive of a classical pediment. The eaves have carved and scroll cut brackets with turned pendants. The main facade gable is pierced with a bull's-eye window. Windows have round arches with distinctive cast iron keystones that may have been made in the Kohler foundry. The arches are supported on pilasters with decorative iron capitals and bases footed on iron sills. A projecting single story porch facing both the front walk and the driveway to the left dominates the southwest corner of the house and shelters the main entrance. Single story porches are also found on the southeast and northeast corners of the house, although the southeast porch was enclosed in the 1920s remodeling. At this time Victorian porch columns and gingerbread were replaced with heavier hexagonal columns and cornice, but original cast iron cresting still crowns each porch.

The original main floor plan formed an asymmetrical cross with parlors dominating the front and center portions and dining room, study, and kitchens occupying the rear and west pavilions. The parlors were separated by massive sliding doors. Most essential features of the plan, as well as the sliding doors, decorative cove moulding in the parlors, and the staircase were retained in the 1920s remodeling.

The iron gazebo and the fountain, which features a cast zinc sculpture depicting three children with a dolphin are original to the house, although they were relocated in the remodeling. The gazebo and the fountain sculpture may have been made at the Kohler foundry.

1920s Remodeling

The 1920s remodeling did not greatly alter the exterior appearance of the house. The southeast porch was enclosed with windows and panels to provide a sunroom adjacent to the front parlor. The east bay was raised a third story to create a penthouse bedroom, and the rear facing pavilion was extended in a two story bay. These additions were

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Sheboygan County Landmarks
1972 county
Sheboygan County Landmarks, Ltd.
Sheboygan, Wisconsin 53081

7. DESCRIPTION

finished with stucco in a muted Mediterranean Revival fashion and in sympathy with the original architecture of the house. The fenestration of the west facing pavilion and back part of the west facade was altered to accommodate remodeling of the dining room and to increase the lighting of the master bedroom above it.

On the interior, the remodeling was more thoroughgoing and utilized accepted Italian motifs of the Eclectic Resurgence. The interior has been little altered in the building's reuse. Victorian wall finishes were replaced with textured plaster painted in cream tones. The dining room was relocated to the west facing pavilion and decorated with oak paneling, ceiling beams, built-in cabinets and sideboards, and a massive table and chairs. Casement windows and cabinet doors are of decorative stained and leaded glass designed by Kasper Albrecht. Flooring is of decorative Moravian tile from Henry Mercer's Pennsylvania factory. The room and its furnishings are preserved as the formal meeting room of the arts center. Moravian tile and Albrecht glass were also employed in the new north facing bay, which became a part of the relocated study. The bay also features a characteristic vaulted ceiling and a carved stone fireplace. Moravian tile was also used in the upstairs hall, the master bedroom, and the redecorated main fireplace. The master bedroom has casement windows of Albrecht glass.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		Assoc. w/ signif. persons

Specific dates 1882; c. 1920¹ **Builder/Architect** J.M. Kohler, 1882; Richard Philipp, 1920s

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Period of Significance: 1888-1901

The John Michael Kohler house is architecturally significant as a good representative example of the late phase of the Italian Villa style in Wisconsin and, in its 1920s remodeling, as the work of an important Wisconsin architect, Richard Philipp. The remodeling was one of an important group of projects done by Philipp for the Kohler family and company during the late teens and 1920s. The house is also significant as the major lifetime residence of John Michael Kohler, the founder of the Kohler Company and a prominent figure in the civic and cultural life of Sheboygan in the late Nineteenth Century. It is of further interest for its association with Walter Kohler, Sr., an important industrialist and governor of Wisconsin, with Lillie and Marie Kohler, local cultural leaders and philanthropists, and with Herbert V. Kohler, Sr., prominent industrialist and philanthropist.

Architecture (local level of significance)

The Kohler house is a good example of the late hybridized phase of the Italian Villa style in Wisconsin, as described by Richard Perrin in The Architecture of Wisconsin, which was skilfully and sensitively remodeled by Richard Philipp in the 1920s using stylistic elements of the Eclectic Resurgence. The house possesses a number of Victorian Italianate characteristics, including an asymmetrical plan, unbalanced massing, low pitched gable rooflines, and round arched window and door openings. Original details of notable interest are the sculptured iron keystones, the ornamental cresting, and the fountain, probably made by the Kohler foundry. No documentary record of the house's architect has been found; family tradition recalls that John Michael Kohler, himself, designed the house. This is plausible, because it is known that other members of the Kohler family in Austria engaged in architecture, including John Michael's father, whose design of a small church survives.

The early 1920s remodeling of the house is at least as significant as its original architecture. The remodeling was the work of Richard Philipp, an accomplished Milwaukee architect of the firm of Philipp and Brust. Philipp was a close friend of Walter Kohler, who was the son of John Michael, and who grew up in the house. In 1914 Philipp and Kohler toured Europe absorbing the rich architectural heritage of the Continent.⁴ The Kohler house remodeling was one of an important series of projects which the architect undertook for the Kohler family and company during the late teens and 1920s. Among the notable Philipp works for the Kohlers were the American Club (1918, 1924; NRHP), Riverbend (1921-1923; NRHP), and a number of other buildings and residences in the planned community of Kohler. Philipp's remodeling of the Kohler house employed many of the Eclectic Resurgence forms for which Philipp had become especially renowned. Where the remodeling intruded on the exterior appearance of the house, Philipp employed

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Buchen, Gustave W. Historic Sheboygan County. n.p. [Sheboygan], 1944, 273.
 Cabot, Marie Kohler et al. "Riverbend." NRHP nomination, Nov. 1979.
 Sheboygan County Landmarks, Ltd. J.M. Kohler Home. Sheboygan, n.d. [1972].
 Sheboygan Times, 29 Apr. 1882.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approximately one acre

Quadrangle name Sheboygan North, Wis.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

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4	8	4	4	3	7	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

All of lots 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, the east 20' of lot 3, and the east 4' of lot 9, Block 308, Plat of the City of Sheboygan. These boundaries include the historic house, its carriage house, and its historic landscaping as well as the modern arts center building, which is connected to the house. The modern arts center building is not significant to the nomination.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David Donath, Guest Curator

organization John Michael Kohler Arts Center

date April 1982

street & number P.O. Box 31

telephone 414/526-3271 (bus.)

city or town Greenbush

state WI 53026

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Richard Murray

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

date 9/30/82

For HCRS use only

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

Beth Croome
 Keeper of the National Register

date 11/30/82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

EXP. 12/31/84

**United States Department of the Interior
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a muted Mediterranean Revival motif which sympathetically could coexist with the Italian Villa style form of the house. Substantially, the remodeled house retained its original stylistic mien. Philipp's remodeling of the interior was extensive, however, and utilized Italian motifs characteristic of that mode of eclectic resurgence design. The dining room and study are excellent examples of this Italian mode of design. Among the most important artistic architectural features introduced in the remodeling were decorative Moravian tile made in Henry Mercer's Pennsylvania factory and decorative stained and leaded windows and glass cabinet doors designed by Kasper Albrecht, the Austrian architect who designed Waelderhaus, a replica of the ancestral Kohler home, built in Kohler village during this period.

Association With Significant Persons (state level of significance)

The John Michael Kohler house is significant as the residence of its namesake, an important Sheboygan industrialist and civic and cultural leader, and the founder of the internationally famous company that bears his name. An Austrian immigrant in 1854, John Michael Kohler came to Sheboygan in 1871 and that year married Lillie Vollrath, the daughter of prominent industrialist Jacob U. Vollrath. Two years later, in partnership with Charles Silberzahn, he bought Vollrath's Union Steel and Iron Foundry and engaged in the manufacture of agricultural implements and other iron products. In 1883 he began manufacturing enameled iron products. In 1888 he organized the Kohler, Hayssen & Stehn Manufacturing Company, which was devoted largely to the production of enameled plumbing fixtures and cookware and ornamental iron products. In 1899 he moved the company out of town to the location that became Kohler village; in 1901, the year of John Michael's death, the company name was changed to J.M. Kohler Sons Company, and later to Kohler Company or Kohler of Kohler. In 1880-1881 Kohler served on the Sheboygan County Board, in 1890 and 1891 he was elected to the City Council, and in 1892 he was elected Mayor of the City of Sheboygan. Greatly interested in the social life of the community, he became closely involved in the Sheboygan Turnverein, and in 1876 acquired one-quarter interest in the Turner Hall. In 1882 he, in company with two others, remodeled the hall into an opera house. With his second wife, Minnie Vollrath, whom he married in 1887, he kept a close involvement in the opera house and in the cultural life of the community until his death.

The house is also important as the boyhood home of Walter Kohler, Sr., the son of John Michael and Lillie Kohler. Walter Kohler became president of the company after the death of his father in 1901 and the deaths of his brothers three years later. Through the 1920s he was responsible for the creation of Kohler village, a nationally important planned industrial community. In 1929 he was elected Governor of the State of Wisconsin.

The house is of further interest as the lifetime residence of Marie Christine Kohler (1876-1943), who was actively involved in the social

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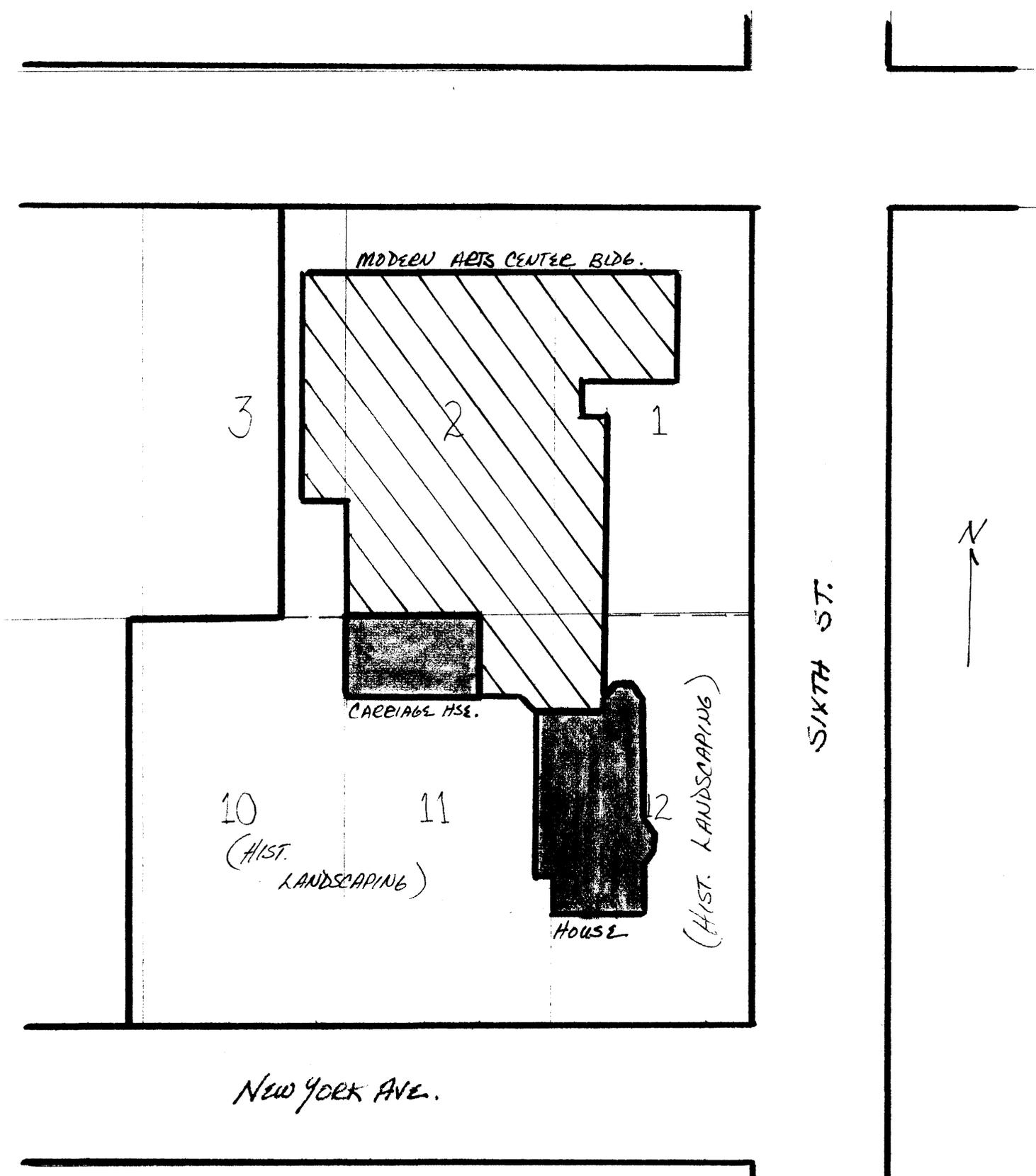
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and cultural betterment of the Sheboygan and Kohler communities and the state. Herbert Vollrath Kohler, Sr., (1891-1968) grew up in the house and later became president of Kohler Company, by that time a firm of international importance. In 1940, with their sisters Evangeline and Lillie, Marie and Herbert Kohler founded the Kohler Foundation, Inc., to "receive and administer funds for educational work and other purposes of community benefit and philanthropy."⁸

NOTES:

- 1 Sheboygan Times, 29 Apr. 1882; Sheboygan County Landmarks, LTD., J.M. Kohler Home (Sheboygan, n.d. [1972]).
- 2 (Madison, 1967), 92.
- 3 Sheboygan Landmarks, Kohler Home.
- 4 Perrin, Architecture of Wisconsin, 109.
- 5 Rexford Newcomb and William A. Foster, Home Architecture (New York, 1932), 147-150.
- 6 Sheboygan Landmarks, Kohler Home; Gustave W. Buchen, Historic Sheboygan County (n.p. [Sheboygan], 1944), 273.
- 7 Marie Kohler Cabot et al, "Riverbend," NRHP nomination, Nov. 1979.
- 8 Sheboygan Landmarks, Kohler Home.



JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER HOUSE
SHEBOYGAN, WI.
NOMINATED PROPERTY (NOT TO SCALE)