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NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 John Balzer Wagon Works Complex

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 818-820, 820A Pennsylvania Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Sheboygan N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Sheboygan code 117 zip code 53081

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>2</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> structures |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> objects |
| | | <u>2</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

No. of contributing resources
previously listed in the
National Register 0

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.

X [Signature]

12/26/91
Date

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

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

[Signature: Beth Boland]

12/23/93

___ 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 or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Industry/manufacturing facility

Warehouse

Domestic/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

other: Astylistic Utilitarian

foundation Stone
walls Brick

roof Asphalt
other Stone
Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Description

The John Balzer Wagon Works complex consists of two buildings; a small, exceptionally intact brick three-story Astylistic Utilitarian form factory building built in 1887, and a now remodeled brick Astylistic Utilitarian form two-story showroom building that was built ca.1877. These buildings are located adjacent to each other. The showroom building has a frontage on Pennsylvania Avenue (818-820) while the factory building (820A) is positioned behind and to the right of it in a location that places it directly behind two unrelated Commercial Vernacular form buildings (816 & 814) that also front on Pennsylvania Avenue, 816 being separated from the showroom building by an alley. John W. Balzer first began constructing wagons and sleighs on this site in the 1850s. His subsequent success enabled him to build a new factory building (818-820), a building that he afterwards turned into a showroom when his larger factory building (820A) was constructed in 1887. Balzer was succeeded in the business by his son, John A. Balzer, who continued to build wagons here until the success of gasoline engine-powered vehicles in the mid 1910s caused him, as it did so many other wagon manufacturers, to convert to the manufacture of automobile and truck bodies. This trade continued until the advent of the Great Depression, after which John A. Balzer's son, John A. Balzer, Jr., reorganized the company into a general welding concern that was in business at this location until the early 1970s. The welding business was conducted in the first story of the showroom building and Balzer converted the second story into four apartments in 1951. Today, the first story of the showroom building and the first story of the factory are used as warehouse spaces, the apartments are still used as such, and the upper stories of the factory are now vacant. Both buildings are in generally good condition and the 1887 factory in particular is remarkably intact, both inside and out. The current owners intend to rehabilitate both buildings for other uses in the near future.

The city of Sheboygan is a port city located on the west shore of Lake Michigan at the mouth of the Sheboygan River. The John Balzer Wagon Works complex is located at the south end of the center of the downtown business district of the city, a district whose southern boundary is formed by a large bend in the course of the east-west flowing Sheboygan River.¹ Land in this district is mostly flat except along its west and south edges, both of which slope down to the river. The block on which the "L"-shaped lot of the Wagon Works complex is located is bounded by Eighth Street on the east, Ninth Street on the west, Pennsylvania Avenue on the south, and Center Avenue on the north. The main facades of the buildings in the complex face south onto the east-west running Pennsylvania Avenue, historically one of Sheboygan's principal commercial thoroughfares. Sheboygan's main post office (522 N. Ninth Street - 1923) and its City Hall (828 Center Avenue - 1915) are both still located within half a block of the complex and until the 1970s, most of the streets in this

¹ The 1990 population of Sheboygan was 48,085.

JAN 10 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 1

area were lined with commercial establishments, including Sheboygan's major banks and department stores. Unfortunately, many of these fine nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings have since been demolished for urban redevelopment projects and for expanded parking and nearly all those that survive have suffered serious alterations. As a result, John W. Balzer's 1887 factory building is now one of the most intact nineteenth century commercial buildings remaining in downtown Sheboygan.

Factory and Showroom Building 818-820 Pennsylvania Avenue (ca.1877) Non-Contributing

This building, the earliest of John W. Balzer's surviving factory buildings, was constructed ca. 1877 and it is rectilinear in plan, two-stories in height above a full basement, has exterior walls clad in cream brick, and its principal south-facing facade abuts the sidewalk that runs along Pennsylvania Avenue. This building (hereinafter called the showroom building to distinguish it from the later factory) is now free-standing due to the demolition of the buildings that used to flank it to the west. In 1877, though, the showroom building was part of an almost continuous row of commercial and industrial buildings fronting on Pennsylvania Avenue and its west-facing side elevation was concealed by a now demolished two-story frame building (822 Pennsylvania Avenue). The east-facing side elevation, however, was designed to face onto an empty lot, a portion of which still survives as a gravelled alley that now separates the showroom building from the later building known as 816 Pennsylvania Avenue. The rear north-facing elevation of the showroom building then faced two non-extant frame houses that fronted onto a now vacated east-west running alley that originally bisected this block longitudinally.²

The 24-foot-wide two-story main facade of the showroom building acquired its present appearance when it was remodeled by John A. Balzer, Jr. in 1951-1952.³ The facade is now asymmetrical in design and two-bays in width and the left-hand bay of the first story contains a flat-arched entrance door opening. The wood frame door is inset slightly into the facade at the top of two concrete steps and it has five equal-sized horizontal lights above a single panel of the same size. A one-light transom is then placed above the door, which leads to the upstairs apartments, and the opening is crowned by a single row of header bricks. A large rectilinear display window that provides light to the first story retail space and a second entrance door opening that gives access to this space are then placed in a single large flat-arched opening that makes up the right-hand bay. The single light display window is set flush with the facade and it has a metal frame and there is a wood bulkhead below it. The entrance door opening is inset deeply into the facade

¹ In 1877, the rear of the lot behind the current buildings at 816 and 814 Pennsylvania Avenue was occupied by two one-story frame storage sheds associated with the wagon works. These sheds were demolished when the new factory was built in their place in 1887.

² Building Permits. Building Inspection Unit, City Hall, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 2

just to the right of the window. This door and the transom above it are also reached by ascending two concrete steps and they are identical in design to the door in the left-hand bay.

The cream brick wall surface of the second story and the original cornice are still intact. The original window openings, however, have been altered. The left-hand bay of the second story of this facade consists of a single small flat-arched window opening that has a concrete sill and that contains a one-over-one-light double hung window. The right-hand bay is identical but twice as wide and it contains a pair of these windows. The facade is then terminated by a tall corbelled brick cornice.

An excellent photograph of this building dated 1927⁴ shows that at that date this facade was symmetrical and three-bays in width. The first story contained two tall, very thin, almost full-height flat-arched window openings that had short panelled bulkheads below them. These openings flanked a much wider center bay that contained a triple group of tall, thin, wood-framed fourteen light windows, each of which had a short panelled bulkhead below it. These windows were probably part of a three-fold garage door that would have allowed wagons and other vehicles to enter and exit directly onto Pennsylvania Avenue. The bottom part of this opening is obscured in the photograph, however, so this is only a conjecture at present. The first story was then surmounted by a wide lintel of simple design and the second story contained three separate segmental arched window openings, each of which contained a six-over-six-light double hung wooden sash window.

The 90-foot west-facing side elevation of the showroom building was originally and is still windowless and without decoration. A vertical line about midway along the elevation divides its length into two roughly equal halves, the right-hand (south) half being surmounted by a simple stepped (3 steps) parapet that descends to the north and hides the gently sloping asphalt-covered roof of the building. The low parapet above the left-hand half of the elevation continues the descent and it has no steps along its length.

The corresponding east-facing side elevation originally faced onto an empty lot and window and door openings were set into its length as need dictated. Unfortunately, no documentation of the original appearance of this elevation has yet been found and its present appearance is a mixture of original elements and ones that resulted from the 1951-1952 remodeling. This elevation now faces on an alley whose east side is comprised of the west-facing side elevation of 816 Pennsylvania Avenue. Spanning the head of the alley and placed about ten feet above grade is a sign formed out of large steel letters that read "Balzer's."⁵ The east elevation of the showroom building is also divided into two roughly equal length sections and its left-hand

⁴ SCHRC 530-122-2. In the collection of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.

⁵ This sign does not appear in the 1927 photograph cited in footnote No. 4.

JAN 10 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 1 Page 3

(south) half is also surmounted by a simple stepped (4 steps) parapet that descends to the north while a low unstepped parapet above the right-hand (north) half continues the descent. This elevation is nine-bays in width, the first five bays being located in the left-hand half. The only opening on the first story of this half is in the fourth bay from the right, and consists of a large flat-arched window opening with a concrete sill, which contains a pair of twelve-light metal factory sash windows. To the left of this opening are two large separate door-sized wall patches which may indicate the location of earlier doors.* The second floor of the first bay from the left now contains a paired door and window opening which contains a two-over-two-light double hung window with horizontal muntins and a door with two horizontal lights over three panels. The door then opens out onto a steel jump basket. The second and third bays from the left each contain a small two-over-two-light double hung window with horizontal muntins, the fourth bay contains another paired door-window opening with a jump basket, and the fifth bay contains a pair of two-over-two-light double hung windows, again with horizontal muntins.

On the right-hand half of this elevation, the first story of the sixth bay from the right contains a large segmental-arched door opening crowned with two courses of header bricks. The opening contains a pair of wooden doors that each have twenty-four-lights above a single panel. These doors are identical in design to ones found on the 1887 factory, so they are probably original to the building. The second story of this bay contains a third paired door-window opening with a jump basket. The first story of bays seven through nine each contains a single segmental arched window opening that is filled with an original twelve-over-twelve-light double hung window. These windows are very similar in design to ones found on the 1887 factory and they are almost certainly original to the showroom building. The second story of the seventh bay contains a pair of two-over-two-light double hung windows with horizontal muntins and a common concrete sill, the eighth bay contains a single window of this type, and there is no opening in the second story of the ninth bay.

The rear north-facing elevation of the showroom building is two-bays in width and asymmetrical in design. The first story of the left-hand bay consists of a large flat-arched garage door opening that contains a panelled wooden sectional overhead door of the roll-up type. This door is six-sections in height and five-panels in width and each of the panels in the top three sections is glazed. The second story above contains a paired door and window opening. The window opening has a brick sill and contains a two-over-two-light double hung sash while the door has four

* Both the 1903 Sanborn-Perris map of the site and the 1927 photograph show that a small one-story, rectilinear plan, frame construction, clapboard sided office ell was attached to this elevation for a time. This ell was built across part of the alley and its front was flush with the main facade of the showroom building. The showroom was then called the "repository" and it is likely that one or both of the patches on the side elevation represent doors that allowed passage between the building and the office.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 4

horizontal lights. The second story of the right-hand bay contains an identical paired door and window and both doors open out onto a metal balcony sheltered by a shed roof that is covered in metal sheets. A flight of metal steps descend from this balcony to the ground, and as they do, they pass besides a very small metal-walled, shed roofed, one-story, rectilinear plan ell that now covers most of the original segmental-arched opening that is located in the first story of the right-hand bay of the rear elevation.

Despite the various alterations listed above, the showroom building still retains sufficient architectural integrity to reflect its historic past. The basic fabric of the building is still intact and in good condition and the building's overall dimensions are unchanged. The alterations mostly affect window and door openings on the main facade, but a number of original window openings and original windows still survive elsewhere on other elevations of the building.

Factory 820A Pennsylvania Avenue (1887) Contributing

The Astylistic Utilitarian form factory that John W. Balzer built in 1887 is in almost completely original condition today, a remarkable circumstance for a building of its age, type and location. This building consists of a rectilinear plan three-story main block whose very shallow-pitched gable roof has a ridgeline that runs north-south. A two-story shed-roofed rectilinear plan ell and a three-and-a-half-story freight elevator shaft are also attached to the north end of the west-facing side elevation of the main block. All of these elements have walls made of cream brick and these walls rest on cut stone foundation walls that enclose a full basement story.

The factory's main facade faces south and its total width includes the south-facing portions of the west ell, the elevator shaft, and the main block. The facade of the main block is approximately fifty-feet in width and the left half of its first story is now covered by the rear ell of 816 Pennsylvania Avenue, which was built up flush with it between 1891 and 1903. The right half of the first story is also now hidden from view by a similar ell attached to the rear of 814 Pennsylvania Avenue. Unlike the left half, however, the original wall surface of this half can still be seen since the ell is not actually attached to the wall. There are no openings on the first story, which is only visible from a north-south running alley that runs along the east elevation of the main block of the factory. The two upper stories of the main block are symmetrical in design. The second story is four-bays in width and each bay contains a segmental-arched window opening that has a cut stone sill and a head that is decorated with two courses of header bricks. These openings have simple wood casings and they are each filled with an original flat-arched six-over-

⁷ It is not known whether or not these shutters were ever actually installed. The 1893 picture of the Globe Foundry next door shows the wagon works building in the background and it did not have shutters at that date, six years after construction.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 5

nine-light wooden sash double hung window unit. Window openings of this size and design are used on every elevation of the factory and each of these openings is also flanked by two pairs of metal pins that were intended to hold shutters.⁷ The third story of this facade is identical to the second and the facade is then terminated by the very shallow-pitched main gable end, which is itself surmounted by three corbelled courses of brick that act as a cornice that encircles the entire main block. Two small brick chimneys whose original height has been somewhat reduced are then placed on the slopes of the roof above.

The south-facing elevation of the west ell contains no openings and most of it is hidden by the attached elevator shaft. The first and second stories of the one-bay-wide south-facing elevation of this shaft each contain a single six-over-nine-light window of the type described above. The third story contains an identical segmental-arched window opening, but this one has now been bricked shut.

The east-facing side elevation of the factory faces onto a narrow hard-surfaced alley that serves the commercial buildings that line N. Eighth Street. This elevation is seventy-five-feet in length and seven-bays-wide. The first story of the first bay from the left (south) features a large segmental-arched carriage door opening that contains two flat-arched twenty-light over three-panel wood frame doors. These doors are then surmounted by a forty-light transom. The second, third, and fourth bays contain window openings of the type described previously. These windows are still intact but their lower sashes are now covered with a sheet of plywood. The fifth bay contains a smaller segmental-arched double door opening that is filled with a pair of flat-arched ten-light over two-panel wood frame doors, and the sixth and seventh bays each contain a window opening of the type just described.

The basement story of this elevation is just barely visible today. The segmental-arched heads of three windows can still be seen at the base of bays two, four, six, and seven, but the openings themselves have been filled and are no longer visible from the outside.

The second story of this elevation contains seven six-over-nine windows and the third story is identical. The elevation is then surmounted by the corbelled brick cornice described previously and this cornice is partially hidden by fragments of the now badly deteriorated metal gutters that originally lined this non-overhanging eave.⁸

⁸ An early photograph of this part of Sheboygan that was printed on page three of the April 23, 1926 edition of the Sheboygan Press shows that there were originally four small brick chimneys arrayed along the edges of both the east and the west slopes of the roof of the main block of the factory. These chimneys have since been removed.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 6

The north-facing rear elevation of the factory originally faced onto an east-west running alley that bisected this block. Today, however, this alley has been vacated and all the buildings that originally fronted onto Center Avenue to the north have been demolished for parking. The north-facing elevation of the factory is comprised of the five-bay-wide north elevation of the main block and the two-bay-wide elevation of the west ell. The first story of the first two bays from the left of the main block consists of a large segmental-arched carriage door opening that contains three folding twelve-light over one-panel wood frame doors. The second and third bays each contain a six-over-nine-light window and the fifth bay consists of a segmental-arched entrance door opening that contains a sixteen-light over three-panel wood frame door.

The second story of the rear elevation of the main block contains six-over-nine-light windows in bays one, two, four and five. The third bay contains a segmental-arched entrance door opening of the same width as the window openings but placed lower. This opening contains a four-panel wood door that opens onto an interior staircase that runs up the inside of the rear elevation. An identical door opening and door is placed in the left-hand bay of the third story and this story's four remaining bays each contain a single six-over-nine-light window. The elevation is then terminated in the same way as that of the main facade of this block.

The wall surface of the approximately twenty-foot-wide north-facing elevation of the west ell is continuous with that of the main block. This elevation is two-bays in width and the left-hand bay of its first story originally contained a segmental-arched door opening that contained a pair of doors. This opening is now bricked shut and the right-hand bay contains a six-over-nine-light window. Each of the second story bays originally contained a single segmental-arched window opening. The left-hand one contains a six-over-nine-light window, but the right-hand window contains a fixed six-light window of identical size. This ell is then terminated by a corbelled brick cornice that is identical to the one found on the main block and the asphalt covered shed roof of the ell slopes gently to the west.

The west-facing side elevation of the factory is comprised of the west elevations of the main block, the west ell, and the elevator shaft. Originally, this elevation faced towards a large foundry located next door, but all of the buildings that one fronted on Pennsylvania Avenue to the west of the factory have now been removed and the west half of the block is now used for parking. The first two stories of the three left-hand bays of the main block are hidden by the west-facing elevation of the west ell. The first and third bays of the main block's third story each contain a single six-over-nine-light window. The second bay consists of the base of a tall tapered brick chimney mass that rises high above the roof of the factory.

The thirty-foot-long west elevation of the west ell is also three-bays in width. The first story of its left-hand bay contains a large oblong flat-arched window opening (probably a later alteration) that has a brick sill and contains two six-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 7

over-six-light double hung windows that flank an eight-light fixed window. The second story contains a single large segmental-arched window opening that contains a pair of fixed ten-light windows. The first story of the center bay contains a segmental-arched entrance door opening that contains a flat-arched nine-light over two-panel wood frame door. There is no opening in the second story of this bay. The first story of the third bay from the left contains a six-over-nine-light window while the second story contains a six-over-six-light double hung window.

What would have been the fourth bay from the left of the west elevation of the main block of the factory is covered over by the one-bay-wide three-and-a-half-story freight elevator shaft that is attached to the main block at this point. The first story of the west-facing elevation of this shaft contains a large segmental-arched double door opening that is filled with two solid wood batten doors made of angled boards. The second and third stories both originally contained segmental-arched window openings that were filled with six-over-nine-light windows. The window in the second story is still intact behind a sheet of plywood, but the third story opening has been bricked shut. The shaft is then terminated by a corbelled brick cornice and the slope of its shed roof descends towards the north.

The first, second, and third stories of the fifth and seventh bays from the left of this elevation of the main block each contain a single six-over-nine-light window. The first story of the sixth bay contains a large segmental-arched loading door opening that contains a pair of fifteen-light over three-panel wood doors. The second story of this bay contains an identical loading door opening, and the third story contains a six-over-nine-light window.

The interior of the factory is, if anything, even more intact than the exterior. The basement story is not used and it is not accessible when the freight elevator is not running. The first story of the main block consists of a single large room that originally housed the blacksmithing and woodworking operations of the wagon works. This room has brick walls which clearly show the flat wood lintels and double courses of header bricks that are placed above the doors and windows. The floor consists of wide planks that have been so worn down by use that the knots in them are now raised above the surrounding wood. A massive centered beam that helps support the "X"-braced ceiling joists runs the length of the ceiling and it is upheld by four equally massive 12" x 12" chamfered wood posts, each of which has a massive wood capital. Centered on the west wall of the room is a large flat-arched opening that opens into the freight elevator shaft. This elevator has the typical wooden gate of its kind and it is still operable. Further north on this wall is the now sealed off entrance to the first story of the west ell, a story that contains the original boiler room of the factory.

The second story of the factory is reached by climbing a well-worn flight of twenty wooden stairs that are attached to the north wall of the main block. The second story of this block also consists of just a single large room that originally housed

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 8

other stages of the factory's wood working operations. This room is not as tall as the one below, but it is otherwise essentially identical in terms of design and of materials used. Here also, a large flat-arched opening in the room's west wall opens into the elevator shaft and a flat-arched entrance opening that is positioned further north on the same wall opens into a smaller workroom that occupies the second story of the west ell.

The third story of the main block is reached by ascending another flight of eighteen wooden stairs placed on the north wall of the main block. This story was used for the painting and trimming of wagons and other vehicles. Unlike the first two stories the walls and gabled ceiling of the third story are all covered in a coat of badly deteriorated but original plaster. The west wall of the main room also contains an entrance into the elevator shaft and a smaller door opening to its right leads out onto the roof of the west ell. At a later date, a plastered partition wall was placed across the width of the room so as to divide off the south quarter of its length. The space thus created was then divided in two by a second partition wall placed at a right angle to the first and two large flat-arched openings located in the first wall gave access to the two new rooms thus created.

This interior is notable for its almost totally original condition, a characterization that is equally applicable to the exterior of the factory building as well. That the original appearance of this building survived fifty years of intensive use is remarkable enough and is a tribute to the three generations of the Balzer family that owned it during this time. That it survived intact in its downtown location is even more remarkable, given the pressures for change that exist in such a setting. Only a handful of the many nineteenth century factories that once existed in this area are still extant today and the number of surviving nineteenth century buildings of any type in the downtown area that have retained a similar level of integrity is even smaller. Consequently, the factory building portion of the John Balzer Wagon Works complex is now one of the most intact nineteenth century buildings remaining in downtown Sheboygan and one of the most intact nineteenth century industrial buildings remaining in the entire city.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Architecture

Industry

Period of Significance

ca.1877-1887⁹

ca.1877-1938¹⁰

Significant Dates

ca.1877

1887¹¹

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

Significance

The John Balzer Wagon Works Complex is being nominated to the National Register of Historic places (NRHP) for its local significance under National Register (NR) criteria A and C. More specifically, the complex is being nominated because of its associations with the NR significance areas of Architecture and of Industry, themes that are also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). Research centered on evaluating the resources in this complex using the Astylistic Utilitarian subsection of the Vernacular Forms study unit of the CRMP's Architecture Theme section and the Carriage and Wagon Works study unit of the CRMP's Industry Theme section. The results of this research is detailed below and confirms that the John Balzer Wagon Works complex is locally significant under criterion A because historically, it was one of the earliest and largest of Sheboygan's several wagon and carriage manufacturing concerns. The Balzer Wagon Works was also Sheboygan's longest-lived company of this type, the firm having been converted into a small scale auto and truck body manufacturer that continued in production until 1938. The complex is also locally significant under criterion C as Sheboygan's most intact surviving example of the type of smaller scale later nineteenth century factory building complex that was once typical of the city's earlier factories.

The showroom building was constructed by John W. Balzer ca. 1877 to replace an earlier frame factory building that had been located on the same site, a site that

⁹ The period of significance for Architecture spans the years between the construction of the showroom building ca.1877 and the factory building in 1887.

¹⁰ The period of significance for Industry spans the years between the construction of the earliest surviving building on the site (the showroom building, ca.1877) and the date (1938) when the Balzer family's subsequent auto and truck body manufacturing business was transformed into a general welding operation.

¹¹ Portrait and Biographical Record of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. Chicago: Excelsior Publishing Company, 1894. Pg. 704.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 1

Balzer had purchased for his wagon works in the 1850s.¹² The site was located in the heart of the downtown commercial district of the city and almost directly across Pennsylvania Avenue from the wagon works of Jacob Jung, Sr. (NRHP -7/10/74). In 1881, Balzer brought his son, John A. Balzer, Sr., into the business and in 1887 he built the new factory building in the rear of the site that is still part of the complex today. In 1888, Balzer retired and his son took over the firm, which continued to build wagons until 1915, when the principal business of the firm shifted to the construction of automobile and truck bodies and their repair. John A. Balzer's son, John A. Balzer, Jr., then reorganized the company into a general welding concern in 1938, and he carried on this business in the ca.1877 showroom building until the early 1970s. Since this firm went out of business, the factory and the first floor of the showroom building have been used as warehouse space. Thus, the resources in this complex were associated with the horse-drawn wagon and carriage manufacturing industry and with related work for their gasoline engine-powered successors for fifty years. Both of the resources within the complex were associated with this manufacturing activity and the factory in particular is still in excellent, near original condition.

Historic Context

An excellent overview of the history of the carriage and wagon manufacturing industry in Wisconsin is incorporated in the Carriage and Wagon Works study unit of the CRMP's Industry Theme section.¹³ Consequently, the discussion of this industry here will be limited solely to its role in the history of Sheboygan.

The growth of industry in the city of Sheboygan began in 1834 when William Paine erected a crude sawmill on the shore of the Sheboygan river midway between the Falls and the present day site of the city. Growth in the region was slow, however, despite the natural geographic advantages of Sheboygan's site at the point where the river emptied into Lake Michigan. Twenty years later, however, the advantages of the location and the settling of the surrounding territory had created conditions that were favorable for the growth of industry and by 1912, when the following history of the industrial enterprises of Sheboygan was written, the city had become a major manufacturing center in Wisconsin.

Lumber was the first commercial article made and then the manufacture of shingles was but a single step further.

¹² "Business in 1836 Centered on Pennsylvania Avenue." The Sheboygan Press, April 23, 1926, Section 2, Pg. 4.

¹³ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986. Vol. 2, Pgs. 13-1 - 13-8 (Industry).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 4

Since the small and very primitive beginning mentioned above, the city of Sheboygan has attained a high place among manufacturing cities, not only of the state but also the nation, for in the production of certain styles of chairs Sheboygan is the leader of all competitors. In 1868 the manufacture of chairs was begun and Sheboygan eventually acquired the sobriquet of the Chair City. She became famous as such the country over, and the civilized world for that matter, as her chairs are in universal demand. By 1891, Sheboygan was listed as a manufacturing center to be reckoned with when other industrial centers were considered. About this time some of the largest establishments in the country for the manufacture of enamelled goods (The Volirath Company) were founded and iron products (The Konier Co.), knit goods and various and numerous other articles began finding their way into the marts of the country from Sheboygan factories and mills.⁴²

Wagons and carriages manufactured in Sheboygan were among the city's earliest products, a situation that the CRMP described as typical of the day. "Growing out of independent blacksmith and wheelwright concerns, carriage and wagon manufacturers marked one of the first small scale industries, along with flour milling, to develop within the expanding agricultural regions of the state. . . . AS larger communities began to develop in the state during the 1850s and 1860s, specialized firms and artisans began to establish themselves in the area."⁴³ One of the earliest firms to develop in Sheboygan was headed by Jacob Jung, Sr. (1831-1905), a carriage and wagon maker who had served an apprenticeship in that trade in his birthplace of Karlsruhe, Germany before coming first to Cleveland and then to Sheboygan in 1855. He found work in his trade with the pioneer wagon-making firm of Brothers & Jones, whose three small frame buildings were then located on Pennsylvania Avenue. After working there just two-and-a-half months he wound up buying the failing firm in partnership with Lawrence Artman. After Artman died in 1866, Jung then became sole proprietor and by 1881 he was employing nine men and doing a business of about \$10,000 a year.⁴⁴ Jung continued the business until 1887, when he sold out to his sons, Jacob Jr., and William. His sons then carried on the business under the name of J. & W. Jung and they later added a decorating and painting service that was an outgrowth

⁴² Zillier, Carl (Ed.). History of Sheboygan County Wisconsin: Past and Present. Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912, Vol. 1. Pgs. 305-306. It should be noted that Sheboygan became a center of large scale toy manufacturing activities early on in its history. In the nineteenth century this activity was carried on by a number of small and medium-sized specialty firms, several of whom, such as the Sheboygan Coaster & Wagon Works in Sheboygan and the White Wagon Works in Sheboygan Falls, specialized in the manufacture of children's wagons. These firms were much larger in scale than the firms that are the subject of this nomination and they should not be confused with them.

⁴³ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Op. cit. Vol. 2. Pg. 13-1.

⁴⁴ History of Northern Wisconsin. Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1881, Pg. 983.

JAN 10 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer wagon works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 6 Page 3

of the carriage trimming part of the carriage manufacturing process. Between 1891 and 1903, the brothers built the building at 829-835 Pennsylvania Avenue (NRHP - 1/10/74) that is still extant today, but carriage and wagon manufacture ceased at this location in the 1910s.

John W. Balzer (1827-1916) was an almost exact contemporary of Jacob Jung, Sr. and he too was an immigrant from Germany. Balzer was born in Goerlitz, Prussia, Germany in 1827, the sixth of seven children. After a three-year apprenticeship as a wagon-maker, Balzer traveled and worked at his trade before emigrating to the United States in 1851. He finally arrived in Sheboygan in 1853, and set up a small one-man wagon-making operation. For a year he did his own work, afterwards employing first one hand and then more. As his reputation grew and as he became more successful, Balzer received contracts for specialty wagons such as a \$65.00 order in 1865 for a new nose cart for the Sheboygan volunteer fire brigade.¹⁷

The wagon-making activities of Balzer, Jung, and others was noted in an account of the history of Sheboygan County written in 1881.

Although the manufacture of wagons, carriages and sleighs is not carried on in Sheboygan on an extensive scale, yet the united products of nine or ten shops, measurably meet the local demand, and export some of their goods. The following are some of the concerns in operation.

J. Jung began business in 1855, and has enlarged his facilities from time to time. He employs nine hands, and does a business of \$10,000 annually.

John Balzer began to make wagons and carriages about twenty-five years ago. Five workmen are employed.

William Krueger started in business fourteen years ago, and built the present shop in 1876. His work is all ordered in advance. Three hands are employed.

A. Buettel started about three years ago and employs three hands in the wagon shop and two blacksmiths.¹⁸

This pattern of local needs being met by the activities of several small shops was typical of most of those communities in the state where wagon manufacturing was not a major activity. Such shops typically remained small in size, especially when compared to the large scale wagon manufacturing operations in cities such as Kenosha and Racine, but good management and strong local demand kept many firms such as Balzer's prosperous as long as the horse continued to provide the motive power.

¹⁷ Leberman, J. E. One Hundred Years of Sheboygan: 1846-1946. Sheboygan: 1953, Pg. 30.

¹⁸ History of Northern Wisconsin. Op. cit., Pgs. 982-983.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 4

As his resources and business increased, he (John W. Balzer) enlarged the capacity of his shop. In 1881, his son, John, became a partner in the business, and in 1887 they erected their present (1894) factory. The plant consists of a sales room 24x90 feet, two stories in height; and factory 60x75 feet, three stories. They employ about thirty-five hands, turning out wagons, buggies and carriages, their work being well known to dealers in their trade. In 1888 the business was turned over to the son, who is recognized as one of the prominent young businessmen of Sheboygan.¹⁹

John W. Balzer finally died in Sheboygan twenty-seven years later at the age of 88.²⁰ His son, John A. Balzer, Sr. (1858-1944)²¹ continued the carriage and wagon manufacturing activities of the company as long as the market for such products lasted. In 1906, for instance, the son followed in his father's footsteps by supplying a small horse-drawn hook and ladder "truck" to the now professional Sheboygan Fire Department for the sum of \$675.00.²² By the mid 1910s, however, the city directories had begun to list the firm as an auto body manufacturer. This change in the orientation of the company was in line with general trends in the industry.

With the turn of the century, a new aspect of vehicular design, the horseless carriage, was introduced. The automobile, which began to appear in the early 1900s in the state, eventually caused the demise of the wagon and carriage industry as reviewed above. In the early years, a number of firms attempted to develop automobile departments within their wagon and carriage factories, marketing both products from their showrooms. By 1910, however, the automobile was gaining wide acceptance, as was the gasoline tractor, and the demands for farm wagons and riding carriages rapidly decreased. Many concerns were retooled for the sole manufacture of automobiles, which in the early days was not dramatically dissimilar from wagon production.²³

The firm continued to be listed as a manufacturer of auto bodies until 1934, with John A. Balzer, Jr. having a separate listing as a welder after 1928. Then, in 1938, after a four year period as an auto body repair shop, the old wagon and carriage manufacturing firm ceases to exist. John A. Balzer, Jr. then occupied the first story of the showroom building for his welding business, a business he continued until the early 1970s. The factory, meanwhile, enjoyed a brief period as a toy factory after World War II, but for most of the years since the demise of the wagon works it has been used as a warehouse.

¹⁹ Portrait and Biographical Record of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. Op. cit. Pg. 704.

²⁰ "Sudden Death of J. Balzer." Sheboygan Press, February 21, 1916, Pg. 1. Obituary of John W. Balzer.

²¹ Sheboygan Press, July 3, 1944, Pg. 1. Obituary of John A. Balzer.

²² Leberman, J. E. Op. Cit., Pg. 34.

²³ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Op. Cit. Vol. 2. Pgs. 13-4 & 13-5 (Industry).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 5

By the time the Balzer Works (as it was later known) ceased operation in 1938, it had served the vehicular needs of Sheboygan for eighty-two years, far longer than any other firm. Besides being one of the two largest firms of its type in the city (the other being the Jung Carriage Works across the street), the John Balzer Wagon Works was also the only firm in Sheboygan to be associated in an historically significant way with both horse-drawn and horseless carriages. In addition, the showroom building portion of the John Balzer Wagon Works complex is believed to be the oldest or one of the oldest buildings in Sheboygan that have associations with the manufacture of wagons and carriages and the 1887 factory building is the city's most intact building of this type. Consequently, the complex is considered to be eligible for inclusion on the NRHP because it still conveys its historic associations and character.

Architecture

The resources in the John Balzer Wagon Works complex are significant to the area of architecture chiefly because the Astylistic Utilitarian form factory building that was built for John Balzer in 1887 is a remarkably intact example of typical nineteenth century factory design and construction. Integrity is an especially important consideration in evaluating factory buildings because such buildings exist solely to serve utilitarian purposes and they are designed to be easily modified when need dictates. Most factory buildings are, after all, basically shells designed to house economically productive activity. Even though such a shell is usually constructed to house a specific manufacturing process, the essentially open, undivided space inside the typical factory building is intended to be readily recycled to suit the needs of new processes and new uses. This recycling process may not happen often, but when it does, the changes that are necessary to implement it tend to be made strictly in the interest of utility and they accumulate over the lifetimes of a building. Since very few manufacturing processes stay static over the useful lifetime of a factory building the likelihood is thus high that older examples will have been significantly altered, either by additions or modifications. As a consequence, intact nineteenth century factory buildings that are still in use as such are rare and the most intact examples are usually buildings that have outlived their useful life as factories. These buildings are usually either vacant and not in use or they are now being used for a relatively passive purpose such as warehousing.

The design and the method of construction of a factory building typically depends on the technology prevailing at the time of its construction. The design of the Balzer factory building is an excellent representative example of what has been defined as "regular mill construction" by Reyner Banham in his book A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture.²⁴ Banham describes the early

²⁴ Banham, Reyner. A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, Pgs. 42-44.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 6

examples of such buildings as having heavy timber internal frames, flat or nearly flat roofs, and segmental-arched window openings that are simply punched through the usually brick exterior walls. These window openings are as plentiful as such construction will permit since factory buildings of this vintage were lit by natural daylight until the advent of electric lighting. Window openings in such buildings were also distributed as needed, utility dictating the overall fenestration plan. All of these elements are present in the buildings in the Balzer factory complex, which, from a design standpoint, are typical representative examples of later nineteenth century factory construction.

Downtown Sheboygan was once rich in examples of factory buildings that were similar in size and appearance to the one in the Balzer Wagon Works. The first railroad did not reach Sheboygan until 1859. As a result, the commercial core of the city was formed well before its arrival and the earliest manufacturing establishments in the city were not located to take advantage of it. Instead, Sheboygan's early manufacturing establishments were scattered throughout the downtown commercial district after the fashion of the time. These firms were all of small size due to economic and sometimes technological necessity, and those that did not require access to water power and water transportation tended to cluster close together. Many of Sheboygan's most important industries including the first plants of Andrew Vollrath and John Michael Kohler (both non-extant) were located within a two-block radius of the Balzer Wagon Works and the larger and very similar factory that belonged to the Globe Foundry and Machine Company (non-extant) was located next door on Pennsylvania Avenue until the 1960s. Most of these early factories were very similar to the Balzer Works in design and construction, but the only one that still survives in the downtown area today besides the Balzer Works is the factory associated with the Jung Carriage Works across Pennsylvania Avenue. The Balzer Works factory, however, possesses a higher degree of integrity than its one-time competitor.

A brief survey of Sheboygan's other nineteenth century factory buildings that was undertaken for this nomination found many important buildings scattered along the shores of the Sheboygan River to the west of the downtown. These buildings are all of importance in the history of Sheboygan's commercial development and many of them appear to have a sufficient degree of integrity to warrant being nominated to the NR on their own merits. None of them, however, had as high a degree of integrity as the Balzer Factory Complex and they are all much larger in size and are representative of a different aspect of the city's industrial history.

Integrity is an important factor in assessing the significance of vernacular form buildings insofar as NR eligibility is concerned. As the author of the commercial vernacular form subsection of the CRMP points out: "Like other building forms, the most significant commercial vernacular examples will be those with the highest

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Balzer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 7

integrity."²⁵ In assessing the integrity of the vernacular form resources in John Balzer Wagon Works complex one finds that the 1887 factory building exhibits exceptional integrity for a building of its type and date. Its predecessor, the ca.1877 showroom building, is more typical of buildings of this type, having been altered to suit later needs and usages. Although altered, however, this building still retains sufficient physical fabric to convey a sense of the historic entirety of the wagon complex. It contributes to the historic appearance of the complex through its integrity of materials, scale, location, association, and feeling. Although some integrity of design and workmanship has been lost, it still succeeds in conveying an impression of the Balzer Wagon Works as a locally significant historic building complex. Together, the buildings in the John Balzer Wagon Works complex constitute one of the most architecturally significant complexes of nineteenth century industrial buildings still remaining in downtown Sheboygan.

Archeological Potential

The Sanborn-Perris Maps of this block shows that earlier buildings on this lot were located in the same places as the extant ones that have since replaced them. Thus, the construction of the two buildings in the John Balzer Wagon Works complex, both of which have full basement stories, probably obliterated most traces of the earlier buildings.

²⁵ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986. Pg. 3-10 (Architecture).

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Bannam, Keyner. A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986,

Building Permits. Building Inspection Unit, City Hall, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

X See continuation sheet

X 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 17E 442560 4844150 B
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

C D

___ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Block 154, Original Plat. E 20' of Lot 9 and W 1/3 of lot 10 and E 2/3 of N 75' of Lot 10.

___ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

These boundaries enclose all the land historically associated with the factory building.

___ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy F. Hegglund/Consultant

organization for: The Alexander Companies, 660 W. Washington Ave. Suite 303

Madison, Wisconsin 53703 date October 10, 1991

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JAN 10 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

John Baizer Wagon Works Complex, Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin
Section number 9 Page 1

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