

(Rev. 8/86)
Wisconsin Word Processing Format
(Approved 2/87)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 17 1988

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

**NATIONAL
REGISTER**

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 Form (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 on a letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only 25% or greater cotton content bond paper.

1. Name of Property

historic name Foth, Christian House

other name/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1209-11 South Seventh Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Milwaukee

vicinity N/A

state WI code WI county Milw.

code 079 zip code 53204

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>	<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>1</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]
Signature of certifying official

2/8/88
Date

 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

 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register.

 removed from the National Register.

 other, (explain:)

Beth Poland

3/22/88

 Signature of the Keeper

 Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

 Domestic/Single Dwelling

 Domestic/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Materials (enter categories from instructions)
Other: Gabled Ell	foundation <u>Brick</u>
	walls <u>Wood</u>
	roof <u>Asphalt</u>
	other <u>Wood</u>

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Description

The Christian Foth House is located on the west side of South Seventh Street between West Scott and West Madison streets in a working-class neighborhood of nineteenth century, one to two-and-a-half story wooden houses and cottages. The city's central business district lies about 2-1/2 miles to the northeast. As part of an urban renewal project, two large townhouse-style apartment buildings have recently been built on cleared land on the east side of South Seventh Street opposite the Foth House. The main elevation of the Foth House faces South Seventh Street. It is sited about twenty feet back from the sidewalk behind a grass lawn. A brick walk flanked by small bushes leads from the sidewalk to each of the two front entry doors and a large pine tree is situated at the southeast corner of the front lawn.

The Christian Foth House, built in 1867, is a small, rectangular, clapboard-sided, two-story house with a one-story south wing. It is a vernacular gabled-ell cottage. The builder was probably Christian Foth, the original owner, who had previously worked as a ship carpenter. The main, two story portion of the house has no basement and is supported on wooden posts buried in the ground. An excavated brick basement is located beneath the one-story, south wing.

The main elevation facing South Seventh Street is comprised of the two-story, front-gabled main block and the one-story, hip-roofed south wing. The latter is set back from the main block and is fronted by a porch. An entry door with a three-light transom, is located in the north bay of the three-bay main block and opens to the enclosed straight flight of stairs to the second floor. A four panel door with a transom, balanced by a four-over-four light sash window, opens from the front porch into the south wing. The original door has been modified by the replacement of the wood in the upper two panels with glass. The original hexagonally paneled front door in the two story north wing was modified in the early twentieth century by the replacement of the upper panels with a square glass window to provide more light for the stairhall. The fenestration of the two-story portion of the house consists of two bays of tall, four-over-four light sash windows on the first story and three bays of two-over-four light sash windows on the second floor. A lunette is centered in the gable. Simple, flat board moldings are used for trim around all of the window and door openings of the two-story north wing.

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Originally the windows and doors had pedimented board window trim with a moulded backband like that which still survives on the south wing, but it was replaced with the present flat boards when the clapboard siding was replaced with new clapboard siding in the mid-twentieth century. The front porch is supported by two square posts with elaborately molded caps.

The remaining three elevations are simply composed and consist of sash windows of various sizes placed to respond to the requirements of the interior. A rear door in a shed addition provides access from the backyard to the two-story portion of the house. The exterior is in remarkably good condition. Aluminum storm windows have been added and an asphalt single roof has replaced the original wood shingle roof. The chimney flue on the south wing has been rebuilt with modern brick.

The interior consists of six small rooms. It was divided into a duplex about 65 years ago, but no important structural alterations were made. The two-story north wing of the house consists of four main rooms, two up and two down connected by the enclosed staircase that runs in a straight flight up the north wall. A door inside the entry provides access to the first floor front room, which is connected by interior doors with all of the other first floor rooms. A portion of the second floor rear room was partitioned into a bathroom in the 1930s, otherwise the floor plan has not been changed.

The rooms have wooden floors, lath and plaster walls and ceilings and simple wood casings with moulded backband trim. The four-panel wooden doors have their original rim-locks and either white milk glass knobs or brown agate knobs. There never were any fireplaces, since the house was heated with stoves. Today the coal stoves have been replaced with gas space heaters. The gas lighting was replaced with electricity in 1923.

At the rear corner of the lot is a small, rectangular, shed-roofed, board-and-batten, combination chicken-coop and storage shed measuring about five by twelve feet. Two vertical board doors provide access to the two interior compartments, the north one for storage and the south one the chicken house. This structure is of nineteenth century construction, but its exact construction date is unknown. It is in a deteriorated condition.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria A B 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	1867 ¹	1867
	Cultural Affiliation	
	N/A	
Significant Person	Architect/Builder	
N/A	Christian Foth ²	

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

Significance

The Christian Foth House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for its local architectural significance under criterion C. The house is architecturally significant as Milwaukee's best-preserved example of a modest, mid-nineteenth century, vernacular, frame, gabled-ell cottage. The period of significance is the date of construction, 1867.

The German Settlement chapter of the Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan has identified as worthy of study those properties with general associations with German settlement that retain a high degree of architectural integrity.³ The Foth House is the city's best preserved mid-nineteenth century example of a working-class, vernacular, Gabled-ell, frame cottage constructed by a German immigrant for his family. The Foth House is important because it is believed to be the city's best remaining intact example of this particular house type.

In Milwaukee, vernacular building types have served an important role in the development of the city by providing functional, easily replicated models for houses and commercial structures. These familiar buildings with their distinctive massing and sparse ornament could be constructed by builders who lacked formal architectural training. Vernacular houses constituted the bulk

X See continuation Sheet

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of the city's more modest housing in spite of the early presence in Milwaukee of a substantial number of professional architect. Although it is the architect-designed structures that have attracted the most official recognition, it was the modest vernacular houses that most Milwaukeeans called home in the nineteenth century and that constituted the backbone of the city's housing stock. In spite of a few minor modifications over the years, the Foth House is the best remaining frame gabled-ell house in the city exhibiting the distinctive massing of a clapboard-sided, gabled upright with a low abutting side wing fronted by a porch. The design impact of this type of house is derived from the formally composed fenestration with its carefully proportioned openings as well as such scale-giving elements as corner boards, frieze boards, window architraves and porch posts, rather than applied ornament, surface texture or picturesque silhouette.

The gabled-ell was the rarest of the various vernacular building types built in nineteenth century Milwaukee. From old photographs, insurance atlases and views, as well as the rarity of surviving examples, we know that relatively few buildings of this type were built in Milwaukee in the nineteenth century. The gabled-ell cottage type was ubiquitous in rural Wisconsin and Michigan before 1880; it is, in fact, the most common rural village and farm house type in these states. The fact that it was not widely built in Milwaukee, was probably due to the fact that its rambling plan did not adapt as well to the city's very narrow lots as did the more compact temple form building type. As a result of a review of the city's comprehensive historic buildings inventory, it is our opinion that, compared with the few other examples in the city, the Foth House is the finest surviving gabled-ell house in Milwaukee. The Foth House reflects the interesting circumstance of a German immigrant carpenter, whose first home in America was a farm in the country south of Milwaukee where gabled-ell houses were once the norm, copying an existing rural building type when he built his suburban house in the wide-open spaces of the sparsely settled near south side of the 1860s. Its remarkable state of preservation can be attributed to the fact that it has been owned by only two families since its construction 120 years ago.

History

The Foth House is located in the oldest settled portion of Milwaukee's near south side, the Walker's Point Plat, which was named after George H. Walker who founded the community in 1834.⁴ The first settlers in the area were Yankees from the east coast, but soon German, Scandinavian and Irish settlers were attracted to the area when traffic on the nearby rivers spurred

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growth in maritime-related businesses. Later, south side industrial development brought still more European immigrants to the area, making the near South Side the city's most dynamic "melting pot" neighborhood, a role it continues to serve today.

Much of the historic architectural fabric of the community has remained intact and a sizable portion of the area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the "Walker's Point Historic District" on December 19, 1978. The Foth House is located a few blocks south and west of this district in a later developed part of the tract.

When the Foth House was built in 1867 the area was on the fringe of the city and contained only a few small cottages and houses. Rapid growth ensued after 1870 and the neighborhood surrounding the Foth House was densely built-up by the late 1880's.

Christian Foth arrived in the United States through the port of New York City in September of 1850.⁵ Foth was part of the first great wave of German immigration to Milwaukee that began in the 1830s and subsided in the later 1850s. Foth was born in 1824 in Schildfeld, Mecklenburg, which is a farming community in present-day northeastern East Germany.⁶ A famine that occurred in Germany in the late 1840s encouraged many Germans, perhaps including Christian Foth, to leave their homeland for what they hoped would be better living conditions in the United States.

Foth must have come almost immediately to Milwaukee because by 1852 he was farming in the Town of Greenfield, a small, rural community southwest of Milwaukee. Town of Greenfield tax rolls for 1852 list Christian "Doath" as the owner of 20 acres in what would today be part of the Village of Greendale, a Milwaukee suburb.⁸ The name "Doath" appears to have been one of the various misspellings that Foth's name was subjected to over the years. The land would have been bounded by present-day South Sixtieth and South Sixty-Eighth streets on the east and west and roughly by West Ramsey and West College Avenues on the north and south. The area is now a modern residential subdivision.

Foth was married in Milwaukee by a Justice of the Peace on October 18, 1852.⁹ His bride, Caroline Marie Kneser, was also a native of Mecklenburg. It is possible that Foth, like many other nineteenth century immigrants, left his fiance in Germany and sent for her later when he became settled.

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The first of seven children, Auguste, was born to the Foths in 1853.¹⁰ Foth apparently decided against a life of farming and probably moved to Milwaukee in 1853 or 1854. Tax rolls for 1854 listed a new owner for the Greendale farm property and on September 12, 1854 Foth purchased a vacant lot for \$350 near the southwest corner of South Eighth and West Scott Streets in Milwaukee about one block west of the present Foth House. Unfortunately he lost the property a few months later on February 10, 1855 when it was sold by the city for back taxes. Foth apparently did not become a property owner in the area again until February 9, 1857 when he regained the ownership of the property he had lost two years earlier.

Foth first appeared in the 1857-58 Milwaukee city directory working as a ship carpenter and living on the south side of West Scott Street between South Seventh and South Eighth Streets. He did not own that property. In 1857, when he regained title to his lot near the southwest corner of South Eighth and West Scott Streets, he most likely used his carpentry skills to build a homestead. Tax rolls for 1857 recorded for the first time a taxable improvement on the property which would have been commensurate with the value of a small house. It was the first of three buildings to be owned by Foth in the neighborhood.

In 1860, not long after settling in his new house, which was originally addressed at 489 Scott Street, Foth changed his occupation from ship carpenter to grocery clerk. It is known that by 1867 he was working for south side grocer Frederick Eilers on West National Avenue.¹¹

Foth bought the vacant land for the present Foth House at 1209-11 South Seventh Street on August 19, 1865 from Gustav and Marie Pfeil for \$300. Gustav Pfeil, a businessman who dabbled in land speculation, lived in the city's central business district and later in Wauwatosa. The long narrow lot was situated on the southwest corner of South Seventh and West Scott Streets with 50 feet of frontage on West Scott Street and 140 feet of frontage on South Seventh Street.

Foth probably built his house on the lot in 1866-1867 because Milwaukee tax rolls for that year recorded the first taxable improvements on the property and the 1867-68 city directory listed him as living there. Although the tax rolls do not indicate the type of improvements, the assessed value would have been commensurate with the value of a small house. Before that time the lot was taxed as being vacant.

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Foth's original lot was platted with the intent that a building would be oriented to face West Scott Street with a deep backyard extending to the south along Seventh Street. Foth apparently wanted to take advantage of the much longer frontage on South Seventh Street, however, so that he could subdivide his lot in the future. He built his house facing South Seventh Street in the middle of the lot and, in 1868, bought the lot immediately to the west of his, which increased the depth of his land to 100 feet extending back from South Seventh Street. In 1868 Foth sold the house he had previously built in 1857 near the southwest corner of South Eighth and West Scott Streets for \$1,075. The buyer was Herman Kueckenthal and his wife who lived there until 1883 when the property was sold to the trustees of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation who either moved or demolished the house to provide a site for the large Victorian Gothic church that presently stands on the site.

According to city directories, Foth continued working as a grocery clerk during the late 1860s and early 1870s. In 1873 he switched his occupation to laborer and in the same year the tax rolls recorded an increase of almost 100 percent in the value of the improvements on his land. The increase almost certainly reflected the construction of the grocery store with an upper flat that still stands today to the north of his house at 1201 South Seventh Street on the southwest corner of South Seventh and West Scott Streets. Foth might have done much of the actual construction himself, reflecting his change of occupation to laborer. In 1874, Foth began operating his own grocery store and he and his family moved to the apartment above the store. The flat-roofed, two-story, Italianate style building survives, but has been greatly altered by the conversion of the first floor retail store into an apartment and by other exterior changes. Foth retained ownership of the house at 1209-11 South Seventh Street according to city tax rolls and probably rented it.

Christian Foth died at the age of 53 on March 27, 1877.¹² His widow and children continued to operate the corner store, but the family moved back to the house at 1209-11 South Seventh Street. In 1881 Mrs. Foth sold the grocery store to Jacob Engel and she and her children moved to a Queen Anne style cottage which had recently been built on her property at 1213 South Seventh Street directly to the south of the original homestead, which she probably rented. Mrs. Foth must have built the new house in 1880 or 1881 because a November 1879 inventory of her property described only the grocery store and one dwelling standing on her lot.

In 1885, the year her son John married, Mrs. Foth and four of her children again moved back to No. 1209-11.¹³ In 1887 Mrs. Foth sold the new

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Queen Anne Style house at 1213 South Seventh Street. She sold the present Foth House at 1209-11 South Seventh Street on September 23, 1890 to Nellie Komschlies for \$2,700. Mrs. Foth moved to West Greenfield Avenue, but disappeared from the city directory in 1891.

The Komschlies family has continuously owned and occupied the Foth House since 1890. Presently residing in the house (1987) is Mrs. Lillian T. Komschlies, the daughter-in-law of Nellie Komschlies. Nellie Komschlies and her husband Charles, a painter, lived in the house until the 1930s. The house was informally converted into a duplex in 1923 when George Komschlies, the son of Nellie and Charles, married the present occupant and the newlywed couple began living on the second floor. When Nellie died in the 1930s, George and his wife Lillian moved to the first floor. In the early 1950s George and Lillian's son Ervin, and his wife Norma, lived in the two room upper flat. George, who had worked for a collection agency, died in the early 1960s, but his wife Lillian continues to live in the house. In recent years, the upper flat has been rented to tenants who are not family members.

Architecture

Architecturally, the Foth House is one of the city's best preserved examples of the practical, no-frills, working-class housing constructed in Milwaukee during the mid-nineteenth century. Vernacular frame cottages of various types with vaguely late Federal and Greek Revival style detailing, made up the bulk of the city's working class housing in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. Nearly all of the examples, however, have either vanished or, with the exception of the Foth House, been so altered that they exhibit little or none of their historic character.

The Foth House is basically a vernacular, gabled-ell structure embellished with modest late Federal and Greek Revival style detailing including a lunette window centered in the gable of the main block, transoms over the front entry doors, and pedimented window and door trim. The simplicity of the house and its detailing underscores the fact that it was built on a working-class budget with little room for the added cost of architectural ornamentation. The use of the already outmoded Federal and Greek Revival massing and detailing as late as 1867 reflects the conservatism of its carpenter builder.

The Foth House is also important as an illustration of the building practices and technology of another age. The foundation structure of the house is interesting as an excellent surviving example of a once common mid-nineteenth century building tradition that has now almost vanished from Milwaukee. The main, two-story portion of the house has no basement and rests

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close to grade on wooden posts buried in the ground, while the one-story wing has a brick walled cellar that extends under the front porch. The cool cellar was used as a summer kitchen and for food storage. Later, when indoor plumbing became common in working-class houses after 1900, the first toilet was installed there. Many modest houses were built this way in Milwaukee before 1875, but practically all have since been underpinned with masonry foundations and most with full basements. The aesthetic effect of this is that the Foth House sits practically at grade with no foundations visible. Since the clapboard siding and sill boards start at the ground level, it has a ground-hugging appearance and a lower scale that contrasts with its neighbors on their high, exposed brick foundations. The result is that the Foth House stands out on the block and presents a much more venerable aspect than its Late Victorian neighbors that has continuously called attention to the house since the 1970s when the first efforts were made to identify architecturally significant buildings in this part of Milwaukee.

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FOOTNOTES

¹City of Milwaukee Tax Rolls for the year 1867. Stored at the Milwaukee Public Library.

²Oral history passed from owner to owner. Foth was also a ship carpenter from 1857 to 1860 and would have had skills to build his own house.

³Ann Legreid, "German Settlement," in Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan, Vol. I (Madison: State Historical Society, 1986), pp. 2-12.

⁴Built in Milwaukee (Milwaukee: Department of City Development, n.d.) p. 171.

⁵Declaration of intent of citizenship, for Christian Foth, Document #12884, filed at Milwaukee County Historical Society Research Library.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Richard O'Connor, The German-Americans (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), pp. 98-99.

⁸Town of Greenfield Tax Rolls for the year 1852, stored at the Milwaukee County Historical Society Research Library.

⁹Milwaukee County Marriage License, "Christian Foth," Vol. 1, p. 24.

¹⁰Federal Census, 1860, Vol. 2:330, Christian Foth; and Federal Census, 1870, Vol. 3:414, Christian Foth (converted to State Historical Society Index).

¹¹Milwaukee City Directory, 1867.

¹²Abstract of Title, 15 April 1935, By Security Abstract and Title Co., 707 North Broadway, Milwaukee, WI, re: 1209-11 South 7th Street

¹³Milwaukee County Marriage License, "John Foth," Vol. 35, p. 356.

9. Major Bibliographical Reference

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 # _____

See continuation sheet
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:
 State Historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Specify repository:
 Historic Preservation Commission
 809 North Broadway
 Milwaukee, WI 53202

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A	<u>1/6</u>	<u>4/2/5/0/6/0</u>	<u>4/7/6/3/1/0/0</u>	B	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	D	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Walker's Point Addition in SW 1/4 Sec 32-7-22 Block 9 South 45' of North 95' (Lots 10 and 12)

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries include the city lot upon which the Foth House stands.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>Les Vollmert/Paul Jakubovich</u>	Date	
organization	<u>Dept. of City Development</u>	telephone	<u>(414) 223-5705</u>
street & number	<u>809 North Broadway</u>	state	<u>WI</u>
city or town	<u>Milwaukee</u>	zip code	<u>53202</u>

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REFERENCES

BOOKS

Legreid, Ann. "German Settlement," In Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan, Vol. 1. Madison: State Historical Society, 1986.

O'Connor, Richard. The German-Americans. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968.

PERIODICALS

Milwaukee City Directory, 1849-1986 (generally one volume for each year).

MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES

Abstract of Title, 15 April 1935, By Security Abstract and Title Co., 707 North Broadway, Milwaukee, WI, re: 1209-11 South 7th Street.

Declaration of Intent of Citizenship for Christian Foth, Document #12884, filed at Milwaukee County Historical Society Research Library.

Federal Censuses, for the years 1860 and 1870.

Milwaukee County Marriage License, "Christian Foth," Vol. 1, p. 24; "John Foth," Vol. 35, p. 356.

Milwaukee County Register of Deeds, transactions involving the Foth Property at the southwest corner of South 8th and West Scott Streets, legal description: Walker's Point Addition in SW 1/4 Section 32-7-22 Block 10 lot 10; and the Foth property at 1209-11 South 7th Street, legal description: Walker's Point Addition in SW 1/4 Section 32-7-22 Block 9 Lots 10 and 12.

Tax Rolls for the City of Milwaukee, 1849-1892; stored at the Milwaukee Public Library.

ORAL SOURCES

Conversations with Mrs. Lillian T. Komchlies, present owner of the house, during August, 1987.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Library. American Geographical Society Collection Librarian. Conversation, 20 August 1987.