

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number: 97000366**

**Date Listed: 5/5/97**

**Banta, George, Sr. and Ellen, House  
Property Name**

**Winnebago  
County**

**WI  
State**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Multiple Name**

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**This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.**

*for* *Beth Boland*  
**Signature of the Keeper**

*7/22/97*  
**Date of Action**

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Section 8, Significant Date: Although the house was constructed in 1878, the period of significance does not begin until 1888, when the Bantas began operating a small press in their living room, and when the house was remodeled. Therefore the only significant date = 1888, within a period of significance, 1888--1946. This was confirmed with Jim Draeger of the WI SHPO staff.

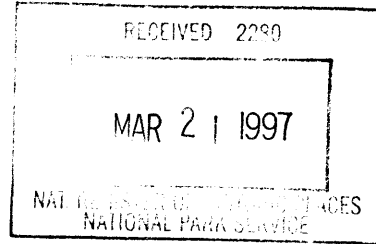
\_\_\_\_\_  
**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 8/86)  
Wisconsin Word Processor Format (1331D)  
(Approved 3/87)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only 25% or greater cotton content bond paper.

1. Name of Property

historic name BANTA, GEORGE SR. AND ELLEN, HOUSE

other names/site number Toepfer, William House

2. Location

street & number 348 Naymut Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Menasha

N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin

code WI

county Winnebago

code 139

zip code 54952

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 N/A

George Sr. and Ellen Banta House  
Name of Property

Winnebago, WI  
County and State

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.

*[Signature]* Date 3/17/07  
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. *Beth Boland* 5/5/97  
\_\_\_ 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:)  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
<u>DOMESTIC/single dwelling</u>	<u>DOMESTIC/single dwelling</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials  
(enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

foundation limestone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Banta House is situated on less than one acre of land, approximately one third mile south of the central business district on Doty Island. Located on the east side of Naymut Street, between Keyes Street and Nicolet Boulevard, the Banta House is surrounded by a tight cluster of late 19th and early 20th century residences, many of which are associated with the prominent businessmen and civic leaders of Menasha.

The Banta House is a two-story gabled ell residence constructed of masonry in 1878 and remodeled in the Queen Anne style in 1888. The plan configuration is T-shaped with a rear wing, and the roof form is comprised of perpendicular gables and a large rear gable. The foundations are rock-faced ashlar limestone, the walls are brick with a stretcher bond, and the roofing materials are asphalt shingles. A one-story contemporary addition, built of masonry with a low hipped roof, is located on the southeast corner of the building and replaces a deteriorated frame addition from the 1920s. A chimney is located on the south slope of the east-west gable.

The fenestration is predominately formal and consists largely of single windows with segmentally arched lintels, limestone sills, and double-hung sash with both single and two-over-two panes. The west or front facade includes four windows and two entries on the first floor, symmetrically balanced by six windows on the second. A plate glass picture window is located on the first floor of the north-south wing. The north facade of the building was also symmetrically balanced at one time, with three windows on each floor. The lower west window was removed during the 1888 remodeling.

The remainder of the building is functionally fenestrated, with limited symmetry between floors. On the east or rear facade, two symmetrically balanced windows are located on each floor of the east-west wing, and one window is located on the second floor of the north-south wing. On the rear wing one window is located on each floor of the south facade, while one window is located on the first floor and two on the second of the east facade. The south facade of the building is also functionally fenestrated, with one window on the first floor and two on the second. A second window on the first floor formally balanced the arrangement of these windows until the construction of the frame addition. A double window under a single segmental arch is located on the south facade of the contemporary addition that replaced it.

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Menasha, Winnebago Co., WI

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The house has three entries on the first floor and one at ground level. The main entrance on the west facade is located on the east-west wing and consists of a single paneled door and transom. An entry to the dining room, another single paneled door, is located at the juncture of the two main wings. A rear entry is located on the south facade of the rear wing. The one ground level entry is located on the west facade of the contemporary addition.

A full-width verandah extends across the first floor of the front facade and incorporates an integral balcony across the second floor of the north-south wing. The balcony is decorative and accessible by windows. Its extant historic fabric includes spindled grilles, incised brackets, turned porch supports and cut-out flat balustrades. The verandah is a contemporary reconstruction that utilized photographic documentation with spindled grilles and incised brackets yet to be installed. The verandah also included a tongue-and-groove, bow-front vestibule at the main entrance, which awaits restoration. In addition to these historic features, the Banta House includes a contemporary terrace on the east facade.

The decorative features of the verandah and balcony are complimented by two heavily ornamented gable ends and a balconied dormer. The gable ends, located on the west and north facades, are composed of incised vergeboards, king post trusswork, fishscale shingles, attic lights, a large floral cartouche, and a bracketed cornice. The balconied dormer is similarly decorated with sunburst ornament, fishscale shingles, attic lights, and turned supports.

Like the exterior, the original floor plan was extensively remodeled by the Bantas. The interior follows a reception hall plan dominated by a corner fireplace and a heavily spindled oak staircase with multiple landings. The reception hall leads back to a library, which in turn opens north into the dining room. Off the dining room in the rear wing is the kitchen. The contemporary addition, off the library to the south, serves as a basement access and replaced a first floor bedroom constructed in the 1920s. The second floor includes four bedrooms, one over each of the principal first floor rooms.

In addition to the house, a two-story clapboard outbuilding converted to a two-car garage is located in the northeast corner of the property. The outbuilding is one of several constructed on the property when the publishing business was operated from the house. The others are no longer extant.

George Sr. and Ellen Banta House  
Name of Property

Winnebago, WI  
County and State

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)  
INDUSTRY

Period of Significance  
1888 - 1946 (1)

Significant Dates  
1878 (2)

1888 (3)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

BANTA, GEORGE SR.

Architect/Builder

WATERS, WILLIAM (4)

BANTA, ELLEN

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

The George Banta Sr. House is nominated to the National Register under criterion B for its association with individuals of local historical significance. George Banta and his wife, Ellen Pleasants Banta, built the George Banta Company into one of the largest publishing companies in the United States. Occupied by the Bantas for more than sixty years, the house is closely associated with the history of the company.

The house is locally significant.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Treaties with the Menominee Indians in 1835 opened the land now occupied by the city of Menasha for public sale. Territorial Governor James Duane Doty was the principal land speculator and the man most responsible for early local development. Elected to Congress in 1848, he used his office to improve the village and attract investors. Chief among these improvements was the federal lock and canal, which routed the Fox-Wisconsin waterway through the village and expanded its waterpower sites.

The first to develop on the waterpower were flour mills that shipped their products to Milwaukee by river. During this period Menasha was part of the second largest flour milling center in Wisconsin. Construction of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad in 1861 then opened up national markets for local woodenware products. Better access to the state's pineries followed in 1872 when local industrialists organized the Wisconsin Central Railroad.

X See continuation sheet

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Incorporated in 1874, the city of Menasha faced two significant obstacles to further industrial growth. First, control of the water power remained in the ownership of the Doty family which had neither the capital nor business acumen to see it properly developed. Second, the city was heavily indebted for the construction of railroads and other public improvements. Potential investors could not secure adequate building sites, nor did they like the prospect of financing significant public debt.

In 1881, attorney P. V. Lawson Jr. gained control of the water power and aggressively promoted new leases and renegotiated existing ones. In 1885 Lawson worked out a settlement of the city's principal debt and began construction of a second canal. During this period local industry expanded rapidly and entered into the production of paper. The Whiting Paper Company opened in 1882, followed by the Gilbert Paper Company in 1887, and then the Howard Paper Company, the Strange Pail Company, and the Menasha Wood Split Pulley Company in 1888.

Inhibited by the Panic of 1893, Menasha's economic development shifted after the turn of the century from general to specialized papers and secondary paper processors. During the early twentieth century, new and established companies focused on diversification, new product development, and plant expansion outside the Fox River Valley. As a consequence, the city's economy remained strong throughout the Great Depression, and continued to expand through World War II and the years that followed.

#### INDUSTRY

The depression years which followed the Panic of 1893 slowed paper industry growth, but after the turn of the century paper manufacturing entered a new era of development and expansion. New companies were formed to manufacture specialized paper and paper-related products: Menasha Printing Company (1900), George Banta Publishing Company (1901), Menasha Carton Company (1912), John Strange Carton Company (1915), Wisconsin Tissue Mills (1915), Edgewater Paper Company (1917), and the Banta Paper Company (1917).

The George Banta Company (as it is known today) started with a small press in the dining room of the Banta House in 1888.<sup>(5)</sup> Begun as a hobby, additional machinery was purchased and moved to the backyard woodshed, where it was operated by a full-time printer. In 1901 the shop burned and the business relocated in the Masonic Block (Upper Main Street Historic District, NRHP 1984). That same year the George Banta Printing Company incorporated with George Banta Sr., president; William C. Wing, vice president; and George L. Pierce, secretary-treasurer.

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The business expanded from a job printery concerned mainly with commercial work to specialization in book and periodical printing. Changing its name to the George Banta Publishing Company, the business published college and university annuals, fraternity publications, scholarly publications, educational workbooks, and military publications. The first plant was constructed in 1910, and in 1917 the George Banta Paper Company was founded as a department of the printing business.(6)

In the decade that followed World War I, the company opened sales offices in Chicago, New York, Boston, and Washington, D. C. Through its New York office, Banta established some of the largest publishing houses as clients, including McGraw Hill, MacMillan, Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich, and Holt, Rinehart & Winston. The Boston office similarly established on-going business relations with Harvard, Yale, Brown and Cornell universities.(7)

Of far greater significance was the business relationship established in 1929 with the Webster Publishing Company of St. Louis. Webster had developed a series of disposable workbooks intended as low-cost teaching aids. While no early production records exist, by 1940 Banta was producing six-and-a-half million workbooks annually. To meet ever increasing demand a twelve-acre plant was constructed in 1946 to house eighteen web offset presses. By 1950 the number of workbooks exceeded thirty-five million, at which time Banta became known as one of the largest publishing companies in the country.(8)

Born in Kentucky, George Banta Sr. (1859-1935) was raised in Indiana, where his father was a district court judge and later president of Indiana University. A teacher and then a practicing attorney, Banta came to Wisconsin after the death of his first wife. As an agent for the Phenix Insurance Company, Banta moved to Madison in 1885 and traveled the state. While in Menasha on business he met Ellen Lee Pleasants (1865-1951), a descendant of the Mason and Lee families of Virginia.

Refugees from the Civil War, the Pleasants family had left their home in Leesburg for Doty Island, where they held title to property acquired in the 1835 government land sale.(9) Careful management of these remaining assets saved the family from destitution and probably provided Ellen (the only daughter of four to marry) with some form of dowery. Married in 1886, the couple purchased the 1878 William Toepfer House in 1888. The house was then thoroughly remodeled, enlarged, and modernized under Ellen's close supervision.(10) William Waters, who designed many houses in the area, is believed to be the architect.

A genuine eccentric, Banta collected firebox lead, balls of tin foil, and samples of dirt from every place he visited. He also had a life-long fascination with printing



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and owned a small hand press, which he kept in the dining room. Printing occasional odd jobs, the hobby grew into a small business which required additional equipment and a full-time printer. At Ellen's insistence the press was moved to a woodshed in the backyard.

A gas engine was then installed to operate the new equipment, but this resulted in several fires, one spreading to the roof of the house. When fire destroyed the shop in 1901, the business relocated to the Masonic Block and incorporated. Still perceived as more of a hobby, Banta continued selling insurance. He was also elected mayor, organized the Robertson & Banta Fuel Company, and published the Menasha Citizen.(11)

Then in 1904 Banta's health collapsed. Diagnosed as tubercular, he was ordered to spend the cold winter months in a warmer climate. The prescription suited Banta's restless nature, but required him to turn his business interests over to Ellen, a demanding and careful manager who liquidated all but the printing company. For the next seven years she managed the business and served as proofreader, while her husband acted as salesman. By 1910 the company had outgrown its space in the Masonic Block and begun construction of a 7,600 square-foot plant, built less than a quarter mile from the Banta home on Doty Island.(12)

Upon completion of the plant in 1911, George Banta Jr. (1893-1977) returned home from college, ostensibly to relieve his mother of her management duties. His primary function, however, was to compensate for his father's failing health. He also helped move the business away from printing and into publishing. During this period, Banta continued to serve as president, George as vice president, and Ellen as secretary-treasurer.(13) Upon Banta's death in 1935, Ellen assumed the presidency and held that office until her death in 1951. During Ellen's tenure the George Banta Company became one of the largest publishing companies in the country with 625 employees.(14)

Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin does not yet include a study unit on the printing or publishing industry. It may be assumed that small printing companies developed in every community large enough to support a newspaper. These businesses usually printed small jobs for a limited customer base and seldom reached beyond the immediate area. Most were probably as ephemeral as the newspapers that spawned them, few offered technical publishing services except on a small scale, and only a very small number developed state or national reputations. As with other industrial study units, the homes of company founders and other secondary structures would be expected to take on more significance where primary industrial structures are no longer extant or extensively altered.

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Primary resources associated with the growth and development of the George Banta Company are limited. The Masonic Block, occupied by the company from 1901 to 1911, is included in the Upper Main Street Historic District (NRHP 1984). The storefront, however, has been modernized and no longer appears as it did in 1911. The plant on Anhaip Street is similarly extant, but the original 1911 portion was demolished in 1939. The only other resource is the Banta home, which takes on greater significance in this context.

Built in 1878 by flour miller William Toepfer, the house was thoroughly remodeled under Ellen's direction in 1888. Interior partitions were moved and the cramped staircase reconstructed to provide more fashionable living arrangements.(15) Far more dramatic was the reconstructed roofline and verandah that transformed the simple gable-ell structure into an imposing Queen Anne residence. While not Queen Anne in essential form, the ornamental features are among the most dramatic and sophisticated still extant in the city.

Occupied by the Banta family for more than sixty years, maintenance of the house declined after 1951. Converted to a rooming house, its condition rapidly deteriorated until acquired and restored by the current owners. Still retaining much of its historic character, the house had suffered a significant loss of integrity through the removal of the full width verandah. Careful reconstruction of this feature has returned the appearance of the house to the period of occupancy by the Bantas.

The Banta House is historically significant for its associations with the founding of a nationally prominent publishing company, and for its association with the personalities that gave the company life. While modestly altered, it vividly reflects the ambitious but simple beginnings of the Banta family.

George Banta made a significant contribution to local industrial history through his role in founding, developing and managing a leading local firm. His wife Ellen also played a pivotal role in the company by presiding over the business during periods of significant expansion both within and after the period of significance and is an important figure in Wisconsin's womens history.

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NOTES

- (1) The period of significance begins with the Bantas' acquisition of the house in 1888 and ends with the twelve acre plant in 1946 during Ellen Banta's presidency.
- (2) Menasha Tax Roll, 1879, p.3.
- (3) Menasha Tax Roll, 1889, p.
- (4) The attribution to William Waters of Oshkosh is based on the similarity of ornamental architectural features found on the Henry Sherry House (527 E. Wisconsin Ave., Neenah). In 1888 Waters was the premiere architect of northeastern Wisconsin.
- (5) Peerenboom, 9.
- (6) Shattuck, 302.
- (7) Peerenboom, 46.
- (8) Ibid., 153.
- (9) Pleasants, 64.
- (10) The Nightmare, p. 25.
- (11) Lawson, 792.
- (12) Twin City News-Record, 7/1/1953.
- (13) Sterling's Menasha City Directory, 74.
- (14) Menasha News-Times, 7/1/1953.
- (15) The Nightmare, 25.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):  
 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:  
 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 1/6 3/8/4/6/2/0 4/8/9/4/4/9/0 B / ////// //////  
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

C / ////// ////// D / ////// //////

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Subdivision of Lot 3, Section 23, T20, R17E as made by Sally McCarty, James Doty, and John B. Macy and wife in partition deed, page 623 Vol. V of Deeds.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundaries are based on the legally recorded boundary lines of the lots historically associated with the nominated property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Peter J. Adams

organization N/A

street & number 636 East Doty Avenue

city or town Neenah

date March 3, 1996

telephone 414/725-1945

state Wisconsin zip code 54956

NPS Form 10-900a  
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Photographic Materials - Identification

BANTA, GEORGE SR. AND ELLEN, HOUSE  
Menasha, Winnebago Co., WI  
Photos by Peter J. Adams, April 1995  
Negatives at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Photo #1 of 7: Exterior, view from west.

Photo #2 of 7: Exterior, view from north.

Photo #3 of 7: Exterior, view from east.

Photo #4 of 7: Exterior, view from south.

Photo #5 of 7: Exterior, view of garage from west.

Photo #6 of 7: Interior, reception hall staircase.

Photo #7 of 7: Interior, library looking into dining room.

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Bob and Linda Spencer  
348 Naymut Street  
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