

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

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

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

## 1. Name

historic Gale, Zona, House

and/or common Portage Women's Civic League Clubhouse

## 2. Location

street & number 506 West Edgewater Street not for publication

city, town Portage vicinity of congressional district 2nd

state Wisconsin code 55 county Columbia code 021

## 3. Classification

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

## 4. Owner of Property

name Portage Women's Civic League, Betty Shaw, President

street & number 506 West Edgewater Street

city, town Portage vicinity of state Wisconsin 53901

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Columbia County Courthouse

street & number 717 East Cook Street

city, town Portage state Wisconsin 53901

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Set in a well-kept 1920s-30s residential area in Portage, the Zona Gale House is a two-story-plus-attic, rectangular clapboard-covered house covered by a truncated hipped roof. Centrally-located pediments project from the attic level of the house at the south (front) and north facades; on the principle facade, supporting giant-order plaster Ionic columns to each side of the center entranceway create a projecting portico raised above the rock-faced concrete block foundation, while on the south the pediment caps a two-story, three-sided bay window. One tall brick chimney rests at the west end of the roof, which is covered with asphalt seal. Fenestration mostly consists of extra-wide double-hung windows with multi-paned upper sash. Exterior decoration includes denticulation under the eaves and lining the pediments, an Ionic order doorway with cornice and mock balcony overhead on the south facade, applied giant-order Ionic pilasters at the southeast and southwest corners, and a fanlight in each pediment. A two-story porch at the western half of the rear (north) facade was covered and screened sometime after the construction of the building. This, except for minor repairs and changes such as the addition of wrought iron railings at the front steps, is the only exterior alteration. Secondary entrances located on the rear facade are approached by wood steps.

The interior of the house retains its original plan, with Zona Gale's bedroom and adjoining study preserved on the second floor to the rear. Dark oak wainscoting, floors, stairway with bench, and ceiling beams, all in excellent condition, constitute the most notable interior features. Some of the windows, particularly those in the entrance hall, contain the original diamond-paned leaded glass. Most of the furnishings of the house, including all pieces in Zona Gale's bedroom, are also original.

## 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1906<sup>1</sup> **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

This house was the home of Wisconsin author Zona Gale through most of her adult life. Zona Gale's roots remained in her native Portage, although she was a prodigious traveler, and her best works, some of which were composed in the house, centered about the type of life readily found in a small midwest community. The style of the house also lends considerable architectural sophistication to the Portage area.

Literature. Zona Gale was only a minor literary figure at the time of the construction of her home in Portage. Built in 1906 as a gift to her parents, the house was also her own retreat from the pace of her literary career and life in New York City. Zona Gale carefully supervised the arrangement of the house, providing herself with a study and furnishing it with mementos of her Wisconsin childhood. She also installed a writing desk, which faced out toward the Wisconsin River.<sup>2</sup> During the remainder of her life, Zona Gale lived either in New York or Portage, and until her marriage in 1928 she lived in Portage in this house. She wrote portions of her works here as well, although it cannot be said with certainty which works were written at this house or any other place.<sup>3</sup> It is quite clear, however, that Zona Gale as a writer is best known for her works that mirror the qualities of life typified by small towns like Portage. This would include the romantic stories and novels of her Friendship Village series, as well as the more realistic play, Miss Lulu Bett, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921.<sup>4</sup>

During the latter part of her life, Zona Gale wrote less and became more involved in Wisconsin public affairs. Between 1923 and her death in 1938, she was a member of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, and involved in the selection and later dismissal of University president Glenn Frank.<sup>5</sup> She was also for a time a supporter of the Lafollettes and an active follower of the Progressive Party in Wisconsin. After her death, her old Portage home was given by her husband to the Portage Women's Civic League.<sup>6</sup>

Architecture. The Zona Gale House, imposingly situated against the Wisconsin River, is a grand NeoClassical residence of a solemnity seldom seen in the state. Friends of Miss Gale (now deceased) reported that the writer hired an architect friend from New York to produce the design. Compared with the more rambling, Colonial Revival-Style houses of similar scale built in Portage in the same era, the house is a testament to the urbanity of its architect and original owner. The formal exterior design conceals a freer, more open plan more typical of turn-of-the-century country houses. The plain oak doorframes and moldings, open stair with included bench and closed, paneled balustrade, window seats and nooks, and unadorned screened porches suggest that a more rustic living space was desired. In his biography of Gale, author and friend August Derleth suggests that Zona arranged the interior to recall her own childhood memories; the dignified "colonial" exterior she meant to be a tribute to her Eastern-born parents.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the house is a telling statement of both national and personal tastes and ideas.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Capital Times

August Derleth, Still Small Voice: The Biography of Zona Gale, New York (1940)

Harold P. Simonson, Zona Gale, New York, (1962)

Wisconsin Blue Book, Madison (1977)

# 10. Geographical Data **UTM NOT VERIFIED**

Acreege of nominated property 0.18

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

Quadrangle name Portage, Wis.

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

**UMT References**

A 

1	6	3	0	0	6	2	5	4	8	2	3	3	2	5
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

The west 11-1/2 feet of lot 9, all of lot 10, and the east 10 feet of lot 11, of Block 60 of the MacFarland and Armstrong Addition to the city of Portage, Wisconsin.

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

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Terry L. Shoptaugh, Historian, Historic Preservation Division

organization State Historical Society of Wisconsin date May 29, 1980

street & number 816 State Street telephone (608) 262-3390

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national     state     local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Richard Murray

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin date 8/13/80

For HCERS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>W. Ray Price</u>	date <u>10/24/80</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>Grada Hunt McClelland</u>	date <u>10 22 80</u>
Chief of Registration	

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Gale, Zona, House, Portage, Wisconsin

Continuation sheet

Item number 8, 9, 11

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8. Significance

Footnotes

- 1) Wisconsin State Journal, Nov. 5, 1921; Columbia County Book of Records, Vol. 116, p. 23.
- 2) August Derleth, Still Small Voice, pp. 87-90. Letters in the John Myers Olin Papers, located in the Archives of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, discuss Zona Gale's concern to have the property properly landscaped. See her letters to Olin, April 7, May 1, 15 and August 28, 1908.
- 3) An excerpt from a Capital Times series on Zona Gale indicates that she wrote part of her works in Portage. See the issue for May 31, 1974. Nancy Breitsprecher, of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, having done extensive research on the life and works of Zona Gale, has verified that the Bridle Pond for which Gale won the O. Henry Award was written at the house in Portage. For an estimate of Zona Gale's work, and the importance of Portage, Wisconsin, to it, see the article by John O. Stark, "Wisconsin Writers," Wisconsin Blue Book, 1977, p. 121-133; Harold P. Simonson, Zona Gale, notes that after reading Gale's works, Willa Cather commented: "I am haunted by Portage." (p. 4).
- 4) Simonson, pp. 37-45, 78-84.
- 5) Ibid., pp. 128-131. An analysis of the Glenn Frank controversy.
- 6) Information from Mrs. Virginia M. Laing of the Portage Women's Civic League.
- 7) Duluth, op. cit.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Wisconsin State Journal

11. Form Prepared By

Diane Filipowicz, Architectural Historian, Historic Preservation Division

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

816 State Street

Madison

May 29, 1980

(608) 262-2970

Wisconsin 53706