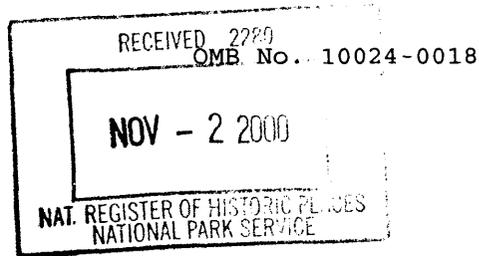


1469



United States Department of Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Masonic Temple Building

other names/site number La Belle Lodge #84 Masonic Temple/ Temple Theatre

2. Location

street & number 116 South Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Viroqua N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Vernon code 123 zip code 54663

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alicia L. Cochran
Signature of certifying official/Title
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

October 25, 2000
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

Masonic Temple Building
Name of Property

Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the 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.
 - See continuation sheet.
 - removed from the National Register.
 - other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: Edwin H Beall Date of Action: 12/1/00

5. Classification

- Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)
- private
 - public-local
 - public-state
 - public-federal
- Category of Property (Check only one box)
- building(s)
 - district
 - site
 - structure
 - object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include listed resources within the count)	
Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meeting hall
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meeting hall
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Classical Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick
roof asphalt
other stone

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

The Masonic building is a two-story, mixed-use, temple and commercial block, 110 feet wide x 218 feet long, on Main Street in the center of the commercial district in the city of Viroqua. The Temple Theatre is the core of this large brick-faced, concrete and steel building. Mercantile spaces are located to either side of the theatre entrance and lobby and the Masonic Temple is on the upper floor. A long, narrow lobby leads to the auditorium located at the back of the building. The stairway entrance to the Masonic Temple is in the south bay of the front elevation. A two-story scenery loft is situated at the west end of the vaulted auditorium (see floor plans).¹

The Classical Revival style Masonic building is a two-story, rectangular block. The facade is composed of five primary bays with the entrance located in the center of this composition. On the left side of the building is a single bay, corresponding to the ground floor entrance to the Masonic Temple. The building is constructed of concrete and steel and features a cream brick front elevation trimmed with Bedford stone. The front elevation is ornamented by a plain projecting cornice topped by a pilastered parapet with a sculptured stone cartouche. The large round arched windows in each of the five main bays on the second story are accented by brick voussoirs and masonry keystones. The windows, which feature recessed cream brick tympanums accented by white stone diamonds, display rectangular windows fitted with nine lights bordered by sidelights and by prism glass over lights. Carved emblems of the Blue Lodge, the Chapter, the Commandery, and the Eastern Star on four stone medallions ornament the spandrels between the arched windows. A concrete belt course extends across the front elevation below the windows.

A large marquee suspended by heavy chains hangs above the entrance and extends over the sidewalk. The lighted red marquee, which is ornamented by yellow and blue colored Art Deco stylized design elements, features milk glass letter "boards" on three sides. The curvilinear lines and zigzag Art Deco design elements are highlighted by chaser lights. The lighted letters of "Temple" are displayed in a panel above the letter board. Evenly spaced multiple globe lights are located under the marquee. The open entrance is characterized by tile on the floor and end piers veneered with black and gray granite tiles. The area receives indirect light from the large plate glass store windows along the sides of the entrance. Prism glass transom windows in copper settings are located at the top of the plate glass windows. Four metal and glass doors lead to the theater lobby on the west end of the entrance.

The plan of the Masonic Temple and Temple Theater building provides entrances from the front of the building to all the major interior spaces in the building. The Temple Theatre entrance, in the center bay on

¹ Parkinson and Dockendorff, Blueprints, Masonic Temple Building, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 2

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

the lower story of the Masonic building, is flanked on the north and on the south by storefronts. The 28 foot wide south store features the original prism glass transom windows with copper settings above the plate glass windows on the storefront as well as above the large plate glass windows on the north side of the store. The north windows separate the store space from the recessed Temple Theater entrance. A metal and glass entrance door, a stuccoed apron and an enframed panel for signage above the windows further characterize this well-preserved storefront. The 22 foot wide north store displays a contemporary metal and plate glass storefront, stuccoed aprons and an enframed brick panel above the storefront windows. The plate glass windows are angled to join with the recessed entrance in the center of the storefront. The south window wall of the store, located along the north side of the recessed theater entrance, is characterized by the original prism glass transom windows set in copper frames above large plate glass windows. The recessed Masonic Temple stairway entrance features a wide detailed masonry surround. The masonry surround is ornamented by a cartouche carved with the Blue Lodge emblem and inscribed with the words "Masonic Temple and "1921." The Temple entrance is fitted with a wood door with glass lights topped by a prism glass transom.

The recessed theatre entrance leads to the 14 foot x 110 foot lobby and the 56 x 110 foot auditorium. The lobby space is divided by four evenly spaced boxed ceiling beams. At some time the lobby was divided by a doorway at one of these beams. Classical cornices, friezes and moldings ornament the ceiling and the walls. Art Deco columns spaced along the walls and stylized floral paintings in the two niches at the west end of the lobby further characterize the lobby space. Four copper ceiling lights suspended by metal rods feature stylized plant designs. At the rear of the lobby, restrooms are located beyond the archway on the south side, while a stairway on the north side leads to the basement and to the Masonic Lodge on the upper floor. Four doors with large plate glass windows are situated at the entrance to the auditorium. The tile covered concrete floor slopes toward the street.

The 56 foot x 110 foot auditorium features a vaulted arched ceiling. The stage, originally 20 feet x 56 feet, and the basement dressing rooms, which are accessed by a stairway at the rear of the stage, are at the west end of the auditorium. A small addition to the stage extends over the orchestra pit. A narrow concrete stairway at the east end of the theater auditorium leads to the elevated projection room at the rear of the theater auditorium. Multiple exit doors are located along the side walls as well at the rear of the stage. The concrete auditorium floor slopes toward stage. The remains of large painted stylized floral panels and plaques characterize the side walls of the theater. Stylized floral ornament is found on the narrow bands that follow the arch of the ceiling, the border that accents the arched stage opening and in the grill work on both sides of the stage. Art Deco styled columns frame the grill work/organ screen on both sides of the stage. Massive cornices and moldings ornament the wall and ceiling juncture. Two hanging lights with pink stained glass globes featuring a stylized floral design hang from the ceiling and five indirect light sources are located on each of the side walls. Early stage furnishings include an original 1922 curtain that is painted with local commercial advertizing at the rear of the stage, and a valance decorated with a stylized design in the arch of the front opening. Heavy red velvet curtains hang in the front opening of the stage.

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 3

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

The Masonic Temple on the second floor features a 32 foot x 65 foot lodge room, a 22 foot x 52 foot dining room and a 20 foot x 64 foot club room (see floor plan). Several smaller rooms including a kitchen, restrooms, sitting room, as well as dressing and storage rooms are located at the rear (west) of the lodge and dining rooms. The club room is located at the east end (front) of the building in front of the lodge room and dining room. The stairway from the street entrance terminates in the hallway that extends to the rear of the building along the south wall of the second floor. A narrow hallway also runs along the south side of the Masonic Temple.

The Masonic lodge room continues to display much of its original ornamentation. An elevated stage set off by the proscenium is situated on the east end of the lodge room while a raised dais is located along the west wall of the room. Exit doors are found on the north and west walls and two doors to the adjacent dining room are on the south wall. The lodge room is characterized by the original Classical style plaster cornices along the top of the walls. The plastered walls are further characterized by painted wood paneling or wainscoting with gold colored panels enframed by plain molding above the wood paneling. Painted Egyptian symbols including stylized lotus flowers and vultures are used in the border on the gold panels. Stylized lotus flowers and vultures also accent the wall above the doorways. The symbols of the "eye of the sphinx" superimposed on the "winged sun" design are painted on the wall above the proscenium arch. A large mural painted by A. E. Soderberg entitled the "Pyramid of Cheops and the Sphinx" is located on the wall south of the stage and the grand master's chair while the mural "Pharaoh's Bed in the Island of Philae" also signed by Soderberg is on the wall north of the stage. Velour draperies cover the arched opening of the proscenium. The blue upholstered gray stained benches and oak chairs, including the Grand Master ceremonial chair, as well as lecterns are among the original furnishings in the room. Contemporary carpet covers the original gray battleship linoleum on the floor.

The dining room, adjacent [south] to the lodge room, displays painted blue and gold wall surfaces similar to those in the lodge room and carpeting on the floor. The walls are divided into two parts by stained wood molding. The dining room features the Straube piano purchased for \$475 in 1922. The club room features five, large multipaned windows with sidelights and transom overlights on the east wall and plain plastered walls also divided by wood molding. This social gathering room is fitted with tables, chairs and display cabinets. Contemporary cabinets are in the kitchen.

Masonic Temple Building
Name of Property

Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the
criteria qualifying the property for the
National Register listing.)

A Property is associated with events
that have made a significant
contribution to the broad patterns of
our history.

B Property is associated with the lives
of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive
characteristics of a type, period, or
method of construction or represents
the work of a master, or possesses
high artistic values, or represents a
significant and distinguishable entity
whose components lack individual
distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to
yield, information important in
prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

A owned by a religious institution or
used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or
structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved
significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from
instructions)

Architecture
Social History
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1921-1950

Significant Dates

1921-1922
1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is
marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Parkinson, A. E.
Dockendorff, Bernard
Anderson and Lindstrom,
Contractors

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 1

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Masonic Temple building in Viroqua is locally significant under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of an early 20th century Beaux Arts influenced Classical Revival public building. The Masonic building is comprised of the Masonic Lodge on the second floor, the Temple Theater in the center of the building, two storefronts flanking the Temple Theatre entrance, and the theatre auditorium extending at the rear. The La Belle Lodge invested in this Classical Revival styled combination business and temple block after fire demolished the previous Masonic Temple in 1920. The original Egyptian influenced lodge interior created by the Odin Oyen Interior Design firm is well preserved and the lodge is an intact example of its type. However, the opulent Classical Revival theatre interior designed by the Oyen Company was modified when the Art Deco style design was added in 1931. The Art Deco overlay design has been altered significantly by subsequent attempts to revitalize the theatre. The date for architectural significance is 1921-1922, the year of the original construction and design.²

The Masonic Temple building is significant under Criterion A for its association with the social history of the community of Viroqua. This building contains a lodge of exceptional integrity that has served La Belle Masonic Lodge #84 since it was constructed in 1922. Viroqua's Masonic lodge was granted a charter under the name La Belle Lodge #84 in June 1857, during the initial mid-19th century period of origin and growth in the history of Wisconsin's fraternal organizations. Typically, Viroqua's Masonic Lodge claimed a membership that included the most prominent business and professional men in the community. The Masonic building has further significance under Criterion A because it contains the Temple Theatre in the center of the building. The history of the Temple Theatre represents the entertainment history of the community of Viroqua from the time it opened on July 1, 1922, through the chain theatre era of the Depression to the postwar period of the late 1940s and the 1950s. The Temple Theatre was heralded as "as one of the biggest milestones in the progress of the community" when it opened in 1922, and, again, when it was remodeled in 1931. Between 1922 and the 1950s, the Temple Theatre served as a source of public information, a gathering spot for neighbors, and a landmark of the physical and social growth of the city and its inhabitants. The movie theatre became a primary place for courting and the films were filled with messages about sophistication, wealth and sexual exploration. The Temple Theatre provided a larger stage and auditorium for numerous community events and live theatre productions, lectures and concerts than Viroqua's former Opera House and the preceding storefront movie theater. In the 1950s and 1960s, with the introduction of television and other forms of entertainment, movie attendance at the Temple Theatre

² *Ibid.*, Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922, 5 July 1922, 23 September 1931; Abstract of Title, Masonic Building, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives, 1850-1976.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

declined and the building and the theatre interior deteriorated. The period of historical significance is from the opening of the building in 1922 until the end of the historic period in 1950.³

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Masonic Temple building is located in the center of the commercial district of Viroqua, the county seat of Vernon County. The first permanent white settler of Vernon County remains unclear; however, the first land entry was made by Moses Strong of Mineral Point in 1844. Vernon County, called Bad Ax County when it was established in 1851, and the county seat of Viroqua, then known as the village of Farwell, was selected in 1854. Viroqua, which was located in the middle of the county within the great Driftless Area of Wisconsin, was platted in 1850, incorporated as a village in 1866 and declared a city in 1885. It quickly became the principal and most important municipality in the county. Viroqua has maintained its role as the trading and service center for the agricultural based economy up to the present time.⁴

After fire demolished their lodge and records in February of 1920, La Belle Lodge #84, Free and Accepted Masons, voted to complete the arrangements for the construction of a new combination business block and Masonic Temple on January 19, 1921. On February 2, 1921, the architects Parkinson and Dockendorff of La Crosse were directed to proceed with the plans and specifications of the proposed building. The Main Street site of the previous Masonic Temple in the center of the commercial district was selected for the new building. On March 7, 1921, the trustees of La Belle Lodge purchased Lots 3 and 6 from Fred Eckart, et. al. for \$10,375 following a foreclosure judgement on the property. La Belle Lodge floated a bond issue and constructed the building at an approximate cost of \$145,000. The construction of the Masonic building was begun in September of 1921 by general contractors Anderson and Lindstrom of the Twin Cities. A trust deed for \$150,000 between La Belle Lodge #84 and the First National Bank was recorded on December 13, 1922. The Masonic building and its furnishings were valued at \$225,000 when completed in June 1922.⁵

³ Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; Abstract of Title, Masonic Building, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; "Program and Dinner in Recognition of 140th Anniversary of La Belle Lodge #84 and 75th Anniversary of the Masonic Temple, 1857-1994," La Belle Lodge, Viroqua, WI, 6 September 1997; *Viroqua Censor*, 5 March 1914, 28 June 1922, 5 July 1922, 23 September 1931; "Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84," unpublished paper, La Belle Lodge, Viroqua, WI, 19 January 1921, 2 February 1921, 5 May 1921; *La Crosse Tribune*, 30 July 1922; Date stone, Masonic Temple, Viroqua, WI; *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 14 September 1995, 13 June 1996.

⁴ The history of Vernon County and the city of Viroqua are chronicled in *History of Vernon County, Wisconsin* (Springfield, IL: Union Publishing Co., 1884), pp 5-168; *Vernon County Heritage* (Viroqua: Vernon County Historical Society, 1994), pp. 8-17, 95-97; and Earle Rogers, *Memoirs of Vernon County (n.p.: 1907)*.

⁵ "Program and Dinner in Recognition of Anniversary of La Belle Lodge #84 and 75th Anniversary of the Masonic Temple; 6 September 1997; *Viroqua Censor*, 5 March 1914, 28 June 1922; *Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84*, unpublished paper, La Belle Lodge, Viroqua, WI, 19 January 1921, 2 February 1921, 5 May 1921, 12 July 1922, 24 August 1922; *La Crosse Tribune*, 30 July 1922; Parkinson and Dockendorff, Blueprints: Masonic Building, 1922, Historic Post Card, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; Date stone, Masonic Temple, Viroqua, WI.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

The Temple Theater, a name the Masons selected by ballot over the contending name La Belle Theater, opened on July 1, 1922, under the management of B.C. Brown. At the grand opening Mayor A.F. Smith paid tribute to the Masonic Lodge and to Manager Brown, who put their "all in the new Theatre ...bringing to us a metropolitan Theatre in the faith that this community would respond with the increased patronage necessary to make it a profitable venture" and expressed the hope "that we do not break faith with them." Following a demonstration of the lighting equipment and capabilities that elicited spontaneous applause from the audience, an interpretative dance program by 10-year old Helen Stewart, singing solos by Mrs. F.M. Nye, music on the new \$10,000 Wurlitzer organ by a musician from Chicago as well as selections by the Culver-Longworth orchestra augmented the "movie palace" atmosphere. The opening program featured the film entitled "Smilin' Through" with Norma Talmadge.⁶

La Belle Lodge began to experience financial difficulties early in the Depression when there were substantial losses in income from the building and most of the members were unable to pay their dues. During this period, the Temple Theatre operation was taken over by the Paramount-Publix Theatre company, a national theatre chain. The Paramount-Publix corporation operated over 1600 theaters in the United States and Canada, including the Riviera, the Rivoli, the Majestic, the Bijou, and the Strand theaters in nearby La Crosse. In late August of 1931, the new management announced a complete renovation plan for Temple Theater. During this project, \$15,000 was spent on redecorating in the Art Deco style and in the purchase of new machinery, new Sound-on-Film equipment for talking pictures and a new canopy over the entrance.⁷ Three crews worked day and night for two weeks, beginning the 14th of September, to create a Theatre interior with an "modernistic" effect in time for the opening of the local county fair. The editor of the local newspaper proclaimed the \$15,000 remodeling project changed the Temple Theater "from ordinary to the most modern and finely decorated Theatre in the state and probably in the nation in a town of this size". The editor of the *Viroqua Censor* further commented, "We wish we had the descriptive power and the vocabulary to tell you how much theater has improved and how beautiful it really is, but we are not even going to attempt the job..."⁸

According to the newspaper's account of the alteration of the Temple Theatre in 1931, the new canopy in

⁶ *Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84*, unpublished paper, La Belle Lodge, Viroqua, WI, 12 July 1922, 24 August 1922; *Viroqua Censor*, 5 July 1922.

⁷ The Art Deco interior portrayed on a post card of an interior attributed to the Temple Theatre at the Vernon County Museum clearly is not completely comparable to the extant Art Deco interior in the Temple Theatre. Apparently, the Paramount-Publix Theatre Company decorating crew used this design, but did not adhere to it completely. Historic Post Card, Masonic Building-Temple Theatre Files, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives.

⁸ *Viroqua Censor*, 30 August 1931, 2 September 1931, 16 September 1931, 23 September 1931; *La Crosse Tribune*, 25 August 1931, 26 August 1931, 28 August 1931.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

front of Theatre was the “newest and most modern creation, containing practically a thousand chaser and flicker lights that simulate the color and movement of flame.” The newspaper further reported “Entering the lobby you will find the ticket booth in the lobby moved forward and the lobby itself appearing shorter and wider due to clever paneling and the installation of another set of doors that effectually cut off all sounds of the street and booth from the main auditorium. The doors are in golden antique, the panels in gorgeous hues.” The *Censor* further noted, “The main auditorium is most strikingly beautiful with its paneling and modernistic designs in gold, black, red and other harmonizing shades. The article also noted all this is enhanced by soft lights, there being no flood lights. ... Absolutely everything in the Theatre has been changed or redecorated, even the pipes and radiators being repainted.” According to the *Censor*, “Altogether new staging has been installed behind the scenes and a new lead curtain installed behind the asbestos curtain. Luxuriant rugs are scattered here and there.”⁹

When William Dyson purchased the Masonic building following the foreclosure sale of the Masonic Temple building in December of 1935, he sold the Masonic Lodge on the upper floor of the building back to La Belle Lodge #84 and retained the lower floor for commercial rental property. In January of 1936, Dyson leased the Temple Theatre for ten years to Jacob Eskin. Several months later, the Temple Theatre was renovated. In September, 1936, The *Viroqua Censor* noted the Theatre was “modernized.” The *Censor* reported “Walls, ceiling, floors, all have been repainted and all drapes taken down and dry cleaned. The result is new beauty. ...” The newspaper further noted 644 “new air-cushion chairs...4 inches farther apart.” The newspaper also related the “latest and best electric equipment has been installed,” which included new Western Electric sound and 350 pound speakers together with new lamp houses that “makes both picture and sound the most perfect obtainable anywhere.” The *Censor* proclaimed the “new sound, new acoustics and new screen ... makes actors practically lifelike.”¹⁰ The movie “My American Wife” with Francis Lederec, Fred Stone and Ann Southern was shown at the grand opening on September 2, 1936. Soon after the 1936 renovation of the Temple Theatre, the original Wurlitzer organ and its 292 pipes, no longer needed after the advent of “talking movies,” were moved to the Coon Valley Lutheran Church. Dyson renewed the lease to Eskin and his new partner Harry Meher in October 1945.¹¹

The Masonic building was again the subject of foreclosure litigation in the early 1990s. In a closed-bid auction on November 19, 1993, the Temple Theater and the two store spaces were sold to the highest bidder

⁹ *Viroqua Censor*, 30 August 1931, 2 September 1931, 16 September 1931, 23 September 1931, 30 September 1931 Photograph (Post Card), Temple Theater File, Archives, Vernon County Historical Society.

¹⁰ *Viroqua Censor*, 30 August 1931, 2 September 1931, 16 September 1931, 23 September 1931; 2 September 1936, 3 September 1936; *La Crosse Tribune*, 25 August 1931, 26 August 1931, 28 August 1931; “Program and Dinner in Recognition of Anniversary of La Belle Lodge #84 and 75th Anniversary of the Masonic Temple, 6 September 1997.

¹¹ *Viroqua Censor*, 2 September 1936, 3 September 1936; Abstract of Property, Masonic Temple Building, Vernon County Historical Society.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

following a foreclosure judgement against the lower story of the Temple building for delinquent taxes and unpaid utility bills. The Temple Theater and the two stores were sold to Fred Nelson, a prominent local citizen, who put together a bid of \$32,500. Subsequently, the foreclosed property was legally separated into three properties with three clear titles. Nelson deeded the part of the building housing the Temple Theater to the Vernon County Historical Society on April 19, 1994. The north store was sold to Barry and Susan Paull on April 13, 1994, and the south store was purchased by Steven and Pamela Skrede a few days later on April 15, 1994. On March 1, 1995, the Vernon County Historical Society placed the theater in the hands of the Associates to Restore the Temple Theater group, which was formed to restore and manage the theater property. In 1995, the Temple Theatre restoration was selected for a Historic Preservation Award by the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation, and, in 1997, it was listed as one of the State of Wisconsin's ten most endangered properties.¹²

ARCHITECTURE

The Masonic Temple building in Viroqua is significant under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of an early 20th century Beaux Arts influenced Classical Revival public building in the city of Viroqua. According to Wisconsin's *Cultural Resource Management* manual, the Classical Revival style was popular in Wisconsin in general from 1895 to 1935. The Beaux Arts style, a specialized mode of the Classical Revival, was popular from 1895 until 1920. The Wisconsin manual states the Classical Revival styles were popular particularly for public and institutional building because of their idealistic symbolic association with styles from the past. The Beaux Arts style is characterized by an exuberance of detail and a variety of stone finishes. This style displays projecting facades with colossal columns, pronounced cornices, enriched entablatures topped with a tall parapet, balustrade, or attic story, decorative cartouches, sculptures and medallions and arched openings. The Neo-Classical building, based more on Greek than Roman orders, is distinguished by symmetrical arrangement, monumental proportions featuring colossal pedimented porticoes, pilasters, attic stories and parapets.¹³

The Masonic Temple building is representative of the less dramatic forms of the Classical Revival influenced designs of the early 20th century. The symmetrical design created by the La Crosse architectural firm of Parkinson and Dockendorff displays large round arched windows typical of the Roman architectural orders used in the Beaux Arts style as well as the less elaborate parapet, entablature and moldings generally associated with the simpler neo-classic designs. Sculptured cartouches and medallions characteristic of the

¹² Quit Claim Deed,, Vernon County, Register of Deeds, Viroqua, WI, 395:189, 19 April 1994; Ibid, Quit Claim Deed, 1 March 1995. Copy of Deeds at Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 24 November 1993; Fred Nelson to Vernon County Historical Society, letter, dated 23 April 1994, Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Viroqua, Wisconsin.

¹³ Barbara Wyatt, Ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, Vol. 2 (Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), Architecture 2-18, 2-19.

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Masonic Temple Building
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Beaux Arts style ornament the brick front elevation of this steel and concrete building. Four stone medallions featuring the carved emblems of the Blue Lodge, the Chapter, the Commandery, and the Eastern Star ornament the spandrels above the arched windows on the second story of the Masonic building. A relief panel with a classical swag motif articulates the pediment of the sculptured surround of the entrance to the upper story Masonic Temple.

The Masonic building, reported to be "Viroqua's largest, ultra modern and strictly fireproof structure," was a source of pride for the entire area. Local accounts at the time of construction reported the "fireproof" structure required 47 tons of reinforced steel in the floor and roof and over 21,000 feet of concrete for the floor and ceiling slabs and the supporting pillars. They also noted the walls and partitions are of tile and brick and steel studs with wire lath above the second floor, and a large part of the wires run through pipe conduits, which are imbedded in solid concrete. Detailed descriptions of the building and its construction were recorded by various local newspapers. According to the *La Crosse Tribune*, "The Temple has a frontage of 110 feet and a depth of nearly a full city block. It is built of cream brick with Bedford stone trimmings. Above the large windows in the club room are arranged the four emblems of Blue Lodge, the Chapter, the Commandery and Eastern Star surmounted by an ornamental cornice topped by Bedford stone design in the top center. The front is of the Keneer type with copper setting of all plate glass. There is a sunken arcade entrance with large glass frontage, ornamental tile floor and copper and glass marquee projecting over the sidewalk, upheld by massive chains". The *Tribune* also reported: "Carved in stone over the temple entrance is the design 'Masonic Temple 1921' and the Blue Lodge emblem. The dimensions of the building are as follows: lobby, 14x100; theater, 56x110; north store room, 22x110; south store room, 28x110; lodge room, 32x65; grill and dining room, 22x52; club room, 20x64.." The Masons leased the north store to the H.E. Rogers Dry Goods Company and the south store to the Ellefson and Johnson Clothes Shop.¹⁴

The Parkinson and Dockendorff architectural practice was established around 1905 in the City of La Crosse. Bernard Dockendorff, a La Crosse native, worked from c.1895 to 1897 for the local firm of Stoltze and Schick. Around 1897, he left to study for the three years at the Technicum in Darmstadt, Germany. When he returned to La Crosse, Dockendorff established a partnership with Albert Parkinson that lasted until their death in 1952. A. E. Parkinson, a native of England, was trained in the practice of architecture by his father and in the schools of Scranton, England. Parkinson and Dockendorff was licensed to practice in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, and Illinois. Credited with over 800 buildings, the Parkinson and Dockendorff commissions included schools, residences, hospitals, commercial structures and civic buildings. Commercial buildings in the Viroqua area by the Parkinson and Dockendorff firm include the following buildings constructed in La Crosse: Hoeschler Building at 115 South 5th Avenue in 1930; the Salzer Seed

¹⁴ *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922; *La Crosse Tribune*, 30 July 1922; Masonic Building, 1922, Historic Post Card, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

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Company building at 1205 South 7th Street in 1918; the Newburg Building at 413-421 Main Street in 1916-17; the Riviera Theater in 1920 at 1213 Caledonia Street; the Rivoli Theater at 115-123 North Fourth in 1919-1920. In 1922, the firm also designed the Masonic Temple constructed at 200 West Main Street in nearby Sparta.¹⁵

The Masonic Temple building is one of several significant brick buildings constructed in the early 20th century in Viroqua designed by the La Crosse architects Parkinson and Dockendorff. However, only the First National Bank building at 101 South Main and the Masonic building were constructed in the early 20th century Classical Revival styles. The First National Bank building constructed in 1908 features a pedimented portico with colossal Corinthian columns that is characteristic of the Beaux Arts mode of the Classical Revival style in the early 20th century. The Viroqua Normal School constructed in 1919 at 410 East Center Avenue displays Sullivanesque ornament and the influence of the Prairie School, while the Viroqua High School building constructed in 1924 at 500 East Jefferson exhibits the simplicity of the late Collegiate Gothic style.¹⁶

The Masonic Temple building has further architectural significance because it contains an exceptionally well preserved example of an early 20th century interior design, the Masonic Lodge room. This Egyptian style Masonic Lodge room is also important as one of the few extant examples of the work of the noted interior design firm of Odin Oyen, who was active throughout the upper western region of the United States from the 1880s until his death in 1926. Oyen also designed the original Classical Revival interior of the Temple Theatre on the lower story of the Masonic building.

The original interior of the Masonic Lodge and the Temple Theatre was described in local newspaper articles and is displayed in historic photographs as well as in a water color design by the Oyen Company (see historic photographs).¹⁷ The *La Crosse Tribune* newspaper reported: "Odin Oyen of La Crosse decorated the interior of the whole building. The lobby is attractive in subdued colorings of emerald green and amber and panels containing pastoral scenes with subjects representing music, lyric and the silent arts. In the theater, the walls, vaulted dome ceiling and paneling are of soft mauve and amber with beautiful flowers adorning the curved ceiling and grill work... Nearly two hundred lights surround the stage arranged in series of four colors--red, blue, amber and white. Each side wall of the theater has five ornamental baskets containing four

¹⁵ Joan Rausch, et al. *City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Intensive Survey Report* (La Crosse: n.p., 1983, Addendum, 1996) pp. 66-67, 101-102; Joan Rausch, *City of Sparta, Wisconsin, Intensive Survey Report, 1989-1990* (La Crosse: n.p., 1990) pp. 173-174; *Sparta Herald*, 14 August 1922, 11 September 1923.

¹⁶ *Vernon County Heritage*, p. 13; State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Historic Preservation Division, Inventory Files.

¹⁷ The post card view of the auditorium was found reprinted in the 1924 Viroqua High School Year Book, *Pipe of Peace*, and a copy of the photograph is in the *paper copy of the Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922, located at the Vernon County Historical Museum, Viroqua, WI. The photographs are missing from the microfilm copy of the issue *Censor dedicated to the newly constructed Masonic Building*.

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lights each of the same colors... The Theatre has a seating capacity of 704." In a more subjective account of the original lobby and auditorium, editor Harlow Goldsmith wrote in the *Viroqua Censor*, "Entering the lobby, a trace of amazement takes possession of you. The long passageway with its grand ornamental plastering, paintings, exquisite paneling and coloring, gorgeous light fixtures, modern ticket booth with its marble slab bottom, telephone, curtains and change machines and ticket cancellor, and the massive ceiling beams and noiseless linotile floor makes you wonder whether this is really Viroqua or Chicago. Goldsmith further noted, "As you enter the auditorium, a little exclamation of wonder involuntarily is given vent to. Your eyes roam over the vaulted dome ceiling and drink in the grandeur of he paneling, decorating and huge art-glass lights, then fall to the walls where the scheme of ornamental plastering, paneling, ornamental light baskets and tapestry walls simply enchants you. ... You will find yourself wondering whether or not the grill openings on each side of the stage are not more delicate and artistic even than the walls." Goldsmith maintained "you feel that here a perfect symphony in color effect has finally been arrived at." The stage at the west end of the auditorium is related in the *Viroqua Censor* as being "20 x 56 feet including dressing rooms and organ loft, with a front aperture of 27 feet. In front is the sunken orchestra pit and organ keyboard. ... The curtain is a real work of art and behind it rises the scenery loft, a sheer 52 feet. The scenery is of latest design and is windlessed up, not rolled." Originally, the auditorium was fitted with Heywood-Wakefield opera chairs upholstered in leather, an organ from the Wurlitzer Company of Milwaukee, and an idealite screen and general theatre equipment.¹⁸

Editor Goldsmith 's account includes the following comments on the interior of the Masonic Temple: "Another glorious surprise breaks upon your view as a person ascends the steps to the second floor and enters the Temple. Even to the initiated, it is surpassingly beautiful, and to members of the craft every square foot of wall decoration tells him a story of Masonry. ... Probably the most artistic thing in the lodge room is the two oil paintings, one on each side of the stage. ... Wood panelling and ornamental plastering is everywhere, highly decorated. Beautiful light fixtures heighten the beauty of the decorations, and the silver gray furniture of the lodge room is just a bit more beautiful than any we have seen." Fronting on the street, lighted thru [through] six large windows is the mecca of the brethren to which they may retire for rest, recreation and refreshment when business cares permit-the spacious club room fitted with reading and writing nook, card rooms and tables, and massive, mahogany finish, the best that money could buy."¹⁹

The description in the *La Crosse Tribune* following the completion of the building adds to the account of the original interior of the lodge: "The lodge room, dining room, and club rooms occupy the second floor. Heavy battleship linoleum covers all the floors of the lodge room, club rooms, dining room and kitchen. Wood paneling and ornamental plastering is everywhere tastefully decorated. The general tones used in the lodge room are in grays and blues. The furniture is all in gray oak, upholstered in blue leather. Two

¹⁸ *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922; *La Crosse Tribune*, 30 July 1922.

¹⁹ *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922.

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paintings, one depicting the 'Pyramid of Cheops and the Sphinx,' the other 'Pharaoh's Bed in the Island of Philae' are placed on either side of the grand master's chair....Oriental rugs in soft colors spread on the floors and rich velour drapes hang from open doors and archways."²⁰

Odin J. Oyen, born in 1865, immigrated from Norway with his parents and spent his formative years in Madison. He studied at the Art Institute for two years while working for the Maxwell Decorating Company in Chicago. Oyen moved from Madison to La Crosse in 1888 during the city's boom period. Oyen, first employed to decorate churches, commercial structures and mansions, began to compete for large contracts for large public buildings throughout the entire Upper Midwest. The decoration of large buildings, particularly of courthouses, brought Oyen national recognition. Oyen employed many skilled immigrant craftsmen and artists from Europe, including Joseph Erickson in the 1890s and A. E. Soderberg. Soderberg, who produced the art work for the firm during the years from 1903 and 1922, attended the Academy at Copenhagen, Denmark, and spent considerable time study at the leading art schools in Paris. A commission for work on the Columbian Exposition brought Soderberg to the United States in 1892. In 1912, Oyen opened his new store and studio at 509 Main Street in La Crosse and turned increasingly to a more locally based business or residential interior design. The firm continued under the direction of Oyen's son Leighton after O. J. Oyen death in 1926 and the death of the firm's artist A. E. Soderberg in November of 1922, but closed in 1931 during the Depression.²¹

Extant interior designs by the O. J. Oyen, Interior Design Company in Wisconsin include the Vernon County Court House (1910, 1932) in Viroqua and the Lafayette County Court House (1906) in Darlington. Oyen also created interior designs (non-extant) for the Masonic Temples at West Salem, Sparta (1923) and Madison (1898), Wisconsin, and at Winona (1919), Minnesota. Theatre designs (non-extant) created by the Oyen firm include the theatres of the Friedman Brothers and the Finkelstein and Ruben theater chains in Minneapolis during the years 1912-1925. Under these contracts, O. J. Oyen decorated the New Palace (1916), the Schubert, the Park, the Astor, the Unique, the Grand, and the Oxford theatres in Minneapolis as well as the Princess (1912), the Garrick and the Starland theatres in St. Paul. Local theatres decorated by the Oyen interior design firm include the Riviera Theater (1920), and the Majestic Theater (1910), all in La Crosse, and the New Theater in Richland Center.²²

The exterior of Viroqua's Masonic Temple building has been preserved, for the most part, as it was constructed in the year 1921 to 1922. Alteration of the Masonic building first occurred in 1931 when the Temple Theatre was leased to the Paramount-Publix corporation. The present cantilevered Art Deco style

²⁰ *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, 30 July 1922.

²¹ Rausch, et al. *Intensive Survey Report*, 1996, pp. 71-72; Joan Rausch, *A Catalog of The Oyen Collection* (La Crosse: University of La Crosse, 1979), pp. 2-17, 49.

²² Rausch, *A Catalog of The Oyen Collection*, 1979, pp. 52-54.

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marquee, which replaced the original copper and glass marquee, reflected the new Art Deco interior of the theatre installed in 1931. Over the years, deterioration of the building from years of neglect resulted in deteriorating brick work, a leaking roof, mold and mildew, standing water in the orchestra pit of the theatre, water damage to the ornamental plaster work and peeling wall coverings that revealed earlier decoration in the auditorium.²³

An organized campaign to restore and repair the Masonic building as well as the Temple Theatre began in 1994 after the Theatre was deeded to the Viroqua County Historical Society by local businessman Fred Nelson. The Temple Theatre was placed under the control of the Associates to Restore Temple Theatre by the Vernon County Historical Society. The ARTT (Associates to Restore Temple Theatre) immediately began to raise funds and to work on the repairs and renovations of the Theatre. The initial phase of the restoration plan for the Temple Theater focused on repairs essential to the structure of the building. In the fall of 1994, the new roof was installed by Black's Roofing of La Crosse in November and emergency tuck pointing of the exterior brick work was completed by Holton Brothers of Milwaukee in October. Also, at this time, the renovation of the Art Deco styled marquee was begun. The marquee was repaired, re-wired and painted beginning in the summer of 1994. The newly restored marquee was rededicated during a relighting ceremony on July 27, 1995. Emergency repair of one of the two boilers was carried out in the fall of 1994 in order to maintain the building through the winter season. In the spring of 1995, the second phase of the \$73,000 brick repair project was completed. Restoration of the entrance area commenced in the summer of 1995. The tile work on the floor was created by Dimitri Popov, a Russian master craftsman and tile artist, and the piers flanking the entrance were covered by granite tile.²⁴

The historic interior plan and arrangement of the theater lobby and the auditorium, the storerooms and the Masonic lodge rooms on the upper floor has been maintained. The ornament of the Masonic Temple lodge room, has been exceptionally well preserved. The original painted ornament and designs have been maintained as shown in the historic water color design presented by the Oyen Company in 1922. The remaining surfaces of the lodge room were repainted in 1954 and 1986. Water damage on the west wall of the lodge was repaired in 1995 by the Ritchie Company of Madison. Other alterations of the Masonic rooms include, insulation of the lodge room, installation of carpet over the linoleum floor in 1971 and again in 1995, and the installation of an acoustical tile ceiling in the lodge room. Furnaces were installed in 1950 and again in 1982. A chair lift was added to the entrance stairway in 1967. The location of the ladies

²³ *Viroqua Censor*, 30 August 1931, 2 September 1931, 16 September 1931, 23 September 1931; *Viroqua Broadcaster*, 22 September 1994, 27 July 1995, 13 June 1996, 14 September 1996, 17 October 1996; Dave Coral, A.R.T.T., report, c. 1994, Vernon County Historical Society, Temple Theatre Files.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Quit Claim Deed,, Vernon County, Register of Deeds, Viroqua, WI, 395:189, 19 April 1994; Quit Claim Deed, Vernon County Historical Society to Associates to Restore the Temple Theatre, 1 March 1995. Copy of Deed, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 21 April 1994, 7 July 1994.

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powder room and the mens restroom were reversed and the ladies room was renovated in 1997.²⁵

Although the theatre lobby and auditorium has been redecorated several times, the original classical moldings and plaster ornament in the lobby and the auditorium, the art glass lights in the auditorium and the stage curtain with local advertisements have remained. Soon after the Art Deco interior of the theatre was renovated by the new proprietor Jacob Eskin in 1936, the Wurlitzer theatre organ, which was no longer needed for sound, was removed and installed in the Coon Valley Lutheran Church. Planning for restoration of the interior of the Temple Theatre began in 1994 after the Theatre was deeded to the Viroqua County Historical Society by local businessman Fred Nelson. In September of 1995, the original Wurlitzer organ and its 292 pipes fortunately were returned to the Temple Theatre from the Coon Valley Lutheran Church. The following year, volunteers dismantled, cleaned, repaired, painted and upholstered 600 auditorium seats in preparation for the Sesquicentennial celebration in 1996. A new gas furnace was installed in 1998. The restoration of the original Classical Revival interior of the theatre with the assistance of a \$400,000 grant from the Jeffris Family Foundation is scheduled for the year 2002.²⁶

SOCIAL HISTORY

Viroqua's Masonic Temple building contains a significant representative of a lodge associated with the Freemasons fraternal organization in Wisconsin. According to Wisconsin's *Cultural Resource Management* manual, the Masonic and other fraternal organizations formed an integral part of American culture and society in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Masons provided members of an extremely mobile society with cohesive and relatively constant forms of social order, helping to hold the American culture together. The *Resource* manual points out the Masonic organization's primary purpose is recreational, providing companionship and constituting a social "club." A secret society enamored with regalia, passwords, mystic rites, seals, ceremonies, degrees, signs, and signals, the Masons provided an exclusive organization that conferred status, privilege and a certain degree of prestige to its members. The *Cultural Resource* manual further states the Freemasons initially were organized in Wisconsin in 1823 in Green Bay shortly after the first white settlement was established. The manual further notes the Masons were constructing their own new buildings in the early 20th century, at which time the fraternal organizations also were developing a

²⁵ "Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84," 1954, 15 March 1967, 1982, 1986, 1995, 1997; Jerry Mattson, Interview, Viroqua, WI, 10 February 1999; The original presentation water colour by A. E. Soderberg is part of the Oyen Collection located at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Murphy Library, Area Research Center.

²⁶ Quit Claim Deed,, Vernon County, Register of Deeds, Viroqua, WI, 395:189, 19 April 1994; Ibid, Quit Claim Deed, 1 March 1995. Copy of Deeds, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; Fred Nelson to Vernon County Historical Society, letter, dated 23 April 1994, Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Viroqua, Wisconsin; *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 24 November 1993, 21 April 1994, 7 July 1994, 13 June 1996, 14 September 1996, 17 October 1996; *Viroqua Censor*, 2 September 1936, 3 September 1936; *La Crosse Tribune*, 23 November 1999.

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commercial orientation. Early 20th century fraternal groups were known to work closely with local Chambers of Commerce and businessmen associations to promote trade and commercial activity and civic improvements. In addition, fraternal groups provided an "old-boy" network that facilitated the conduct of business; countless business deals were concluded in fraternal lodges and meeting halls.²⁷

The Viroqua Masonic Lodge was granted a charter under the name of La Belle Lodge #84 in June, 1857. The first lodge room was on the second floor of a private house. In 1871, the Lodge moved to the second floor of the Nichols Building. In 1880, they shared the upper story of the Rogers and William Building with the Odd Fellows. When J. Henry Tate constructed a new building in 1914, he gave the Masons the opportunity to own quarters specifically designed to meet their needs. The upper floor of the Tate Building, which was designed by architect Wells Bennett of La Crosse, was purchased by the La Belle Lodge for \$12,000. Most of the records of the Masonic Lodge were burned when a fire destroyed the Tate building and the Masonic Lodge on February 11, 1920. La Belle Lodge #84, Free and Accepted Masons, voted on January 19, 1921, to build the combined temple and business block proposed by La Crosse architects Parkinson and Dockendorff.²⁸

Typically, Viroqua's Masonic Lodge claimed a membership that included the most prominent businessmen in the community. Among the most noted members was Jeremiah M. Rusk, who was a charter member in 1857 and Master of the La Belle Lodge in 1859, 1860, and 1866. He was elected Sheriff in 1855 and elected to the State Legislature in 1861. Rusk was elected to Congress for three terms in the 1870s, Governor of Wisconsin for seven years in the 1880s, and then in 1889 served under President Harrison as the first Secretary of Agriculture. He retired to Viroqua and his funeral in 1893 was attended by the former President Harrison and other dignitaries. Another locally prominent Mason was Colonel Cyrus M. Butt, an early attorney and Civil War veteran in Viroqua. He devoted 60 years to public office in Vernon County. Following terms as county treasurer, state senator and district attorney, Butt served as county judge for 12 years beginning in 1878. During these years and until after the turn of the 20th century, he continued his law practice, earning a reputation as an "able lawyer" and one of the leading jurists in the county. C. M. Butt joined the Masons in 1860 and served as Master of the La Belle Lodge in 1869-1870. The professional men in the lodge included attorney H. P. Procter, who served as District Attorney from 1874 until 1882 and later as president of the First National Bank. Prominent businessmen were among the most active members of Viroqua's Masonic Lodge. Large mercantile stores were owned by W.F. Lindeman, who owned and operated W. F. Lindeman and Company and established the Bank of Viroqua in partnership with Jeremiah Rusk in 1879; W. N. Coffland, who owned and operated the Coffland and Ellefson mercantile store; M.C.

²⁷ Wyatt, *Cultural Resource Management*, III, Social and Political, 5-1 to 5-7.

²⁸ "Program and Dinner in Recognition of Anniversary of La Belle Lodge #84 and 75th Anniversary of the Masonic Temple, 1857-1994," La Belle Lodge, Viroqua, WI, 6 September 1997; *Viroqua Censor*, 5 March 1914, 28 June 1922; *Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84*, 17 March 1920, 5 May 1920, 19 January 1921, 2 February 1921, 5 May 1921, 12 July 1922, 24 August 1922.

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Nichols, who owned his general merchandise and drug store from 1858 until the mid-1880s and served in the State Legislature in 1882; Howard Williams, who was a partner in the mercantile firm of Rogers, Henry and Williams. C.F. Dahl, who was one of the founders of the Masonic Lodge, operated a grocery store in the 1860s and later became a director and then the president of the First National Bank in Viroqua. William D. Dyson, who engaged in the buying and shipping of grain, tobacco and livestock with his father-in-law Fred Eckhart, supported and guided the Viroqua Lodge through financial crisis during the Depression years. A farming operation was the business of Alonzo May, who was the son of the prominent 19th century resident Colonel Reuben May. Alonzo May attained the rank of a 32 degree Mason and served as Master in 1917 and 1919, and as a trustee of the lodge as well.²⁹

According to the *Cultural Resource Management* manual, the Great Depression signaled the start of a long period of decline for fraternal organizations, which sharply accelerated after W.W. II. The Masonic Lodge in Viroqua began to experience similar circumstances with the onset of the Depression era. Rental income from the two stores and the theater were insufficient to pay the interest on the bonds, and with the decline in the general economic condition of most of its members, led to years of foreclosure litigation. A referendum ordered by the court to resolve the differing positions of the interested parties determined the majority of the bond holders preferred to accept the highest cash bid rather than incorporate and own the building. On December 19, 1935, the U.S. Court deeded the Masonic building to William Dyson, a Lodge member and a prominent businessman, who offered a bid of \$40,000. Dyson sold back the second floor lodge rooms, the stairway and entrance to the La Belle Lodge for \$12,000 on March 21, 1936. The La Belle Lodge became sole owners of the entire second floor on April 29, 1949 when they purchased the club room at the east end of the building from the Dyson family for \$4,000.³⁰

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

The Temple Theatre was built in 1922 as the center core of the Masonic building constructed for La Belle Lodge #84 in the middle of Viroqua's commercial district. This theatre is the most important place associated with entertainment and recreation in the community of Viroqua during most of the 20th century.

The Temple Theatre facilities replaced the old Opera House theatre, which had been constructed on North Main Street in 1891. It was one of two movie theatres operating in Viroqua during the mid-20th century.

²⁹ Earle Rogers, *Memoirs of Vernon County* (1907), pp. 133-134, 305-307, 331-332, 402-403; *History of Vernon County, Wisconsin* (Springfield, IL: Union Publishing Co., 1884) pp. 184-195, 680, 684, 687, 694, 701, 706, 711; Biography and Obituary Files, Vernon County Historical Society; "Program and Dinner in Recognition of Anniversary of La Belle Lodge#84 and 75th Anniversary of the Masonic Temple," 6 September 6, 1997.

³⁰ Wyatt, *Cultural Resource Management*, Social and Political, 5-5; Abstract of Title, Masonic Building; *Viroqua Censor*, 20 November 1935, 25 December 1935; "Program and Dinner in Recognition of Anniversary of La Belle Lodge #84," 1997; Minutes of the La Belle Lodge #84," 18 February 1925, 21 April 1926, 16 February 1927, 16 September 1929, 6 November 1929, 17 June 1931, 15 March 1933, 3 May 1933, 17 January 1934, 27 October 1935, 1 January 1936, 18 March 1936.

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The Vernon Theatre was established on Court Street by Ben Brown in 1932 after the management of Temple Theatre was taken over by the Paramount-Publix Corporation. Movies were shown in Viroqua as early as 1908 by Ben Brown, who fenced off an open lot and enhanced the showing with his piano music. The Vernon Theatre closed in the mid-20th century. The Temple Theatre had a reduced schedule for showing movies for a number of years before it closed its doors completely for several years in the early 1990s.³¹

The Temple Theatre displays the characteristics of a unique architectural space that developed in the early decades of the 20th century in response to the mechanical needs of movie exhibition and the practice of business. The motion picture theater, also referred to as movie palace, was both a product and a symbol of its time. Motion pictures began to show commercially at the turn of the century, as a part of the established forms of popular entertainment, such as the penny arcade and vaudeville theatre. As the medium became more popular in the 1910s and 1920s, buildings were designed exclusively for the special needs of motion picture exhibition. The purpose of the building was to lure people inside and be part of the entertainment. Developers frequently included movie palaces on the first floor of multiple use buildings to recoup the expense of a large office building or other unprofitable concerns. Stylistically, these designs evolved from the traditional building styles to a unique architectural type based on the requirements of movie exhibition and the realization architecture could reinforce the romantic fantasy portrayed on the screen. Although architects during the early period employed the then popular historic styles, modern architecture soon found acceptance in the motion picture theatre, which in keeping with modern trends always aspired to the new.³²

The Temple Theatre was built during the era of the silent movie when movie palaces still featured live entertainment to make the silent movies a more theatrical experience. This well-preserved Classical Revival styled building designed by La Crosse architects Parkinson and Dockendorff calls to mind the high-class architecture of the Neo-classical facades of both vaudeville and legitimate theatres as well as other early 20th century public buildings for which the classically derived historic style was viewed an appropriate sign of good breeding and education. The original Classical Revival interior was designed by the Odin Oyen Decorating Company to provide the ornate period revival extravagance associated with live theatre in a manner typical of the late 1910s and the 1920s. Temple Theatre's Classical Revival interior was rooted in the historic European theatre interiors as well as in the ornate vaudeville theaters found in American cities. Oyen combined the appearance of the traditional theatre and the new movie theatre in his interior design for the Temple Theatre. The original interior of the Temple Theatre resembled the traditional "playhouse"--with rows of seats facing a stage with accommodations for narrators for the silent films and a stage for between films singers and musical presentations. However, the Temple Theatre was designed to have also

³¹ *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 13 June 1996; Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives.

³² Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: an architectural history of the movie theatre* (Yale University, 1994), pp. 1-7, 18, 38, 50-52, 68, 183-194.

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the characteristic elements of the motion picture theatre including a sloped floor, a projection booth and a marquee on the exterior of the building. The Temple Theatre interior displays the remains of Oyen's Classical Revival design such as cornices, friezes and moldings on the ceiling and walls of the recessed vestibule, the lobby and the auditorium as well as around the arched stage opening and in the metal work of the organ grill. The Temple Theatre also displays the original hanging lights with art glass globes in the auditorium and the exposed ceiling beams in the lobby. The proscenium is framed by the heavy draperies that dressed up the screen and reinforced the palatial surroundings and the screen featuring painted local advertisements continues to hang at the rear of the stage. The original screens on either side of the stage for the organ that accompanied silent films, the orchestra pit as well as the stage machinery and scenery loft used in live theater productions [now covered by the extension of the stage] also remain in the building.³³

Editor Goldsmith of the *Viroqua Censor*, commented following the grand opening of the theater: "Never has the Censor editor been so keenly aware of the utter inability of language to express the feelings that surge through the human soul in the presence of beautiful things as he was when he attended the formal opening of the Temple Theatre on Saturday and Sunday. ..Monster crowds took advantage of the opportunity---each audience was really awed and inspired as they filed in and gazed upon the perfect harmony of decoration attained by the blend of lavish yet beautifully blended decorations. Added to this was the sublime music from that great \$10,000 organ in the hands of a master player from Chicago...Altogether, the opening of the Temple Theatre marks one of the biggest milestones in the progress of the community..."³⁴

In 1931, the Masonic Lodge turned control of the Temple Theatre over to the Paramount-Publix Corporation, a giant studio-theater chain, when they experienced financial difficulty early in the Depression era. Like many industries in the 1920s and 1930s, film exhibition was increasingly administered on a national basis and regional and local businesses like the Temple Theatre could not compete. Generally, all the theaters in a chain were standardized and directed by a central authority in New York including all advertising, promotions, prologues, design changes, and architecture. Most owners could ill afford to spend money building or maintaining the movie palaces of the 1920s and resorted to remodeling instead. The Paramount-Publix chain remodeled the Temple Theatre in the Art Deco style, one of the most avant-garde styles of the period, as it was important to the owners that their theatres be at the cutting edge of popular architecture because style sold tickets. In the \$15,000 remodeling project of the Temple Theatre carried out by Paramount-Publix decorating crew, the ticket booth was moved forward and a set of doors in the lobby was added to control sound from the lobby. The theatre was redecorated with paneling, stylized columns and modernistic designs using new colors of gold, black, red and other harmonizing colors. Copper lights with cut-out designs replaced the five original art glass lights. The Temple Theatre was remodeled with the

³³ Ibid, 1-6, 2-23, 34, 183-194; *La Crosse Tribune*, 1 February 1920, p. 9; *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922; *Tribune*, 30 July 1922.

³⁴ *Viroqua Censor*, 28 June 1922.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

objective of introducing the "talking" picture; however, new staging was installed for the continued use of the theatre for live productions and events. The Temple Theatre received an impressive modernistic marquee, the most important and distinctive identity feature of a movie theatre, which replaced the original copper and glass marquee. The integrity of the Art Deco interior was modified within a few years of its installation when the interior was repainted in 1936 after the theatre was returned to local management following the financial upheaval of the Depression years, in which both the La Belle Lodge and the Paramount-Publix Corporation suffered serious economic loss and subsequent reorganization. Presently, the interior of the Temple Theatre displays remnants of the Art Deco style such as the stylized columns applied to the lobby walls and some stylized decoration in the auditorium as well as the copper lights in the lobby and the modernistic marquee over the entrance. The recently restored marquee, which extends over the sidewalk, features about 1000 chaser and flicker lights that simulate the color and movement of flame.³⁵

The Temple Theatre became the center for entertainment in Viroqua after it was built in 1921-1922. The Temple Theatre provided the community a larger stage and greater seating capacity than the old Opera House. The Theatre has staged productions by professional traveling companies as well as local talent shows up to present time. Performances, in addition to the music that accompanied the film, were booked regularly in the Temple Theatre throughout the 1920s. The grand opening of the Theatre on July 1 and 2, 1922, featured a recital by D.D. Kinnell of Chicago on the \$10,000 Hope-Jones Wurlitzer pipe organ, singing by Mrs. E.M. Nye, an interpretative dance program by 10-year-old Helen Louise Stewart as well as the film entitled "Smilin' Through" with Norma Talmadge. The Temple Theatre was used in the 1920s for traveling stock companies such as the Brooks Temple Stock Company, who brought the productions, "The Cheating Husband," "The God of the West," "Madame X." and "Her Dangerous Hour." The La Grande Sisters Players presented "Nightie Nightie" in 1927 and returned to present "It Must Be Love" in 1929. The Lew Henderson Players performed "The Come Back" in November 1929. Music was provided by outside groups such as the Cleveland Symphonic Quintet, who performed at the Temple Theatre in October of 1923. Local stage productions included the 3rd Annual American Legion Ministrils in 1924. The Viroqua Civic Orchestra concerts were offered in conjunction with other events such as a lecture by Frederick Attwood in January 1924, and the movie "Case of the Curious Bride" on another occasion. Movies became the major field of entertainment offered by the Temple Theatre after sound equipment for talking picture was installed during the remodeling of the Theatre in 1931. The movie "Annabelle's Affairs" was featured at the grand opening on September 25, 1931. "Talking movies" replaced the need for special music and for live entertainment. The Theatre organ, so essential to the movie show when the Theatre was constructed, was removed to the Coon Valley Lutheran Church in 1938. However, The Temple Theater continued to offer

³⁵ *Viroqua Censor*, 30 August 1931, 2 September 1931, 16 September 1931, 23 September 1931, 30 September 1931; Valentine, *Show Starts at the Sidewalk*, 1994, pp. 1-6, 25, 33-35, 50-52, 73-75, 88-97, 183-194.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

live performances by groups including the Viroqua Civic Orchestra, the Viroqua City Band and others on a reduced schedule during the 1930s. More recent notable performances at the Temple Theatre include the Home Talent Shows of the 1960s, the Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1996 and the Midcoast Reunion Jazz Band benefit in 1997.³⁶

The Masonic Temple building is significant as a well-preserved representative of Classical Revival architecture. It has further architectural significance because it contains an exceptionally well preserved Masonic Lodge characterized by a Egyptian influenced interior design created by the noted interior design firm of Odin J. Oyen. The original Classical Revival interior created by Odin Oyen for the Temple Theatre was altered considerably in 1931 when the streamlined Art Deco ornament was superimposed over the original Classical Revival style. Furthermore, the Masonic Building is historically significant for its association with the social history theme of the community of Viroqua. The most prominent professional and business men of the community were members of the La Belle #84 Masonic Lodge. In addition, the Masonic Temple building is significant in the history of entertainment in Viroqua because it contains the Temple Theatre, which was the center of entertainment and a gathering place for the community during most of the 20th century.

³⁶ Masonic Building-Temple Theatre File, Vernon County Historical Society, Archives; *Viroqua Censor*, 5 July 1922, 23 September 1931; *Vernon County Broadcaster*, 14 September 1995, 13 June 1996.

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

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Masonic Temple Building
Name of Property

Viroqua, Vernon County, WI
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Multiple see continuation sheet

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section Owners Page 1

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Owners

The following are the owners, business addresses and post office address for the four owners of the Masonic Temple Building in Viroqua (NRHP Nomination):

1. Center Stage Clothing Store, 118 South Main Street, Viroqua, WI 54663

Mailing address of owners: Pam and Steve Skrede
118 South Main Street
Viroqua, WI 54663

2. Common Ground Cafe, 114 South Main Street, Viroqua, WI 54663

Mailing address of owners: Susan & Donald Tully
6638 CTH J
Viroqua, WI 54663

3. Association to Restore Temple Theatre, Ltd., 116 South Main Street

Mailing Address: Box 141, Viroqua, WI, 54663

4. La Belle Lodge #84, Masonic Temple, 118 1/2 South Main Street, Viroqua, WI, 54663

Mailing Address: Masonic Temple
% Mr. Jerrold O. Matson
E7846 STH 56
Viroqua, WI 54663

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Section Photos Page 1

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin
Photographs by Joan Rausch
1996
Negatives at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin

The above information applies to all of the following photographs, except where noted.:

Photograph #1 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Front Elevation)
View from east

Photograph #2 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Historic Photograph)
View from northeast

Photograph #3 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Detail of Front)
View from the east

Photograph #4 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Marquee)
View from south

Photograph #5 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (North Storefront)
View from east

Photograph #6 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (South Storefront)
View from east

Photograph #7 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Detail of North Elevation
of South Storefront)
View from north

Photograph #8 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Rear of Front 2-story Section)
View from southwest

Photograph #9 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (rear)
View from west

Photograph #10 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre auditorium)
View from east

Photograph #11 of 29
Masonic Temple Building [Historic Photograph]
(Theatre auditorium)
View from east

Photograph #12 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Auditorium detail)
View from east

Photograph #13 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Auditorium molding)
View from south

Photograph #14 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Auditorium Art Glass Light)
View from east

Photograph #15 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre Stage Curtain)
View from east

Photograph #16 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Basement Dressing Room)
View from north

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Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

Photograph #17 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre Lobby)
View from east

Photograph #18 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre Lobby Light)
View from west

Photograph #19 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre Lobby Detail)
View from south

Photograph #20 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Theatre organ)
View from south

Photograph #21 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Masonic Lodge)
View from west

Photograph #22 of 29
Masonic Temple Building [Photo of Historic water color]
(Masonic Lodge)
View from southwest

Photograph #23 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Masonic Lodge)
View from east

Photograph #24 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (mural painting)
"Pharaoh's Bed in the Island of Philae"
View from west

Photograph #25 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (mural painting)
"Pyramid of Cheops and the Sphinx"
View from west

Photograph #26 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Detail, Masonic Lodge)
View from north

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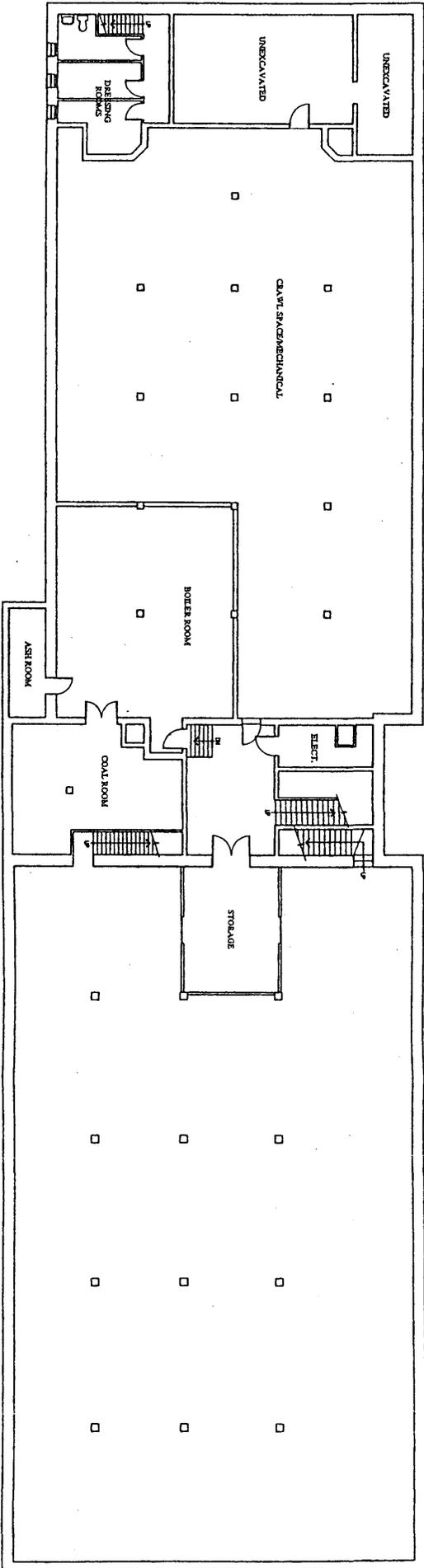
Section Photos Page 3

Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

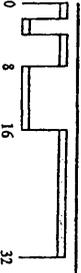
Photograph #27 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Lodge Dining Room)
View from west

Photograph #28 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Lodge Club Room)
View from south

Photograph #29 of 29
Masonic Temple Building (Lodge Sitting Room)
View from east

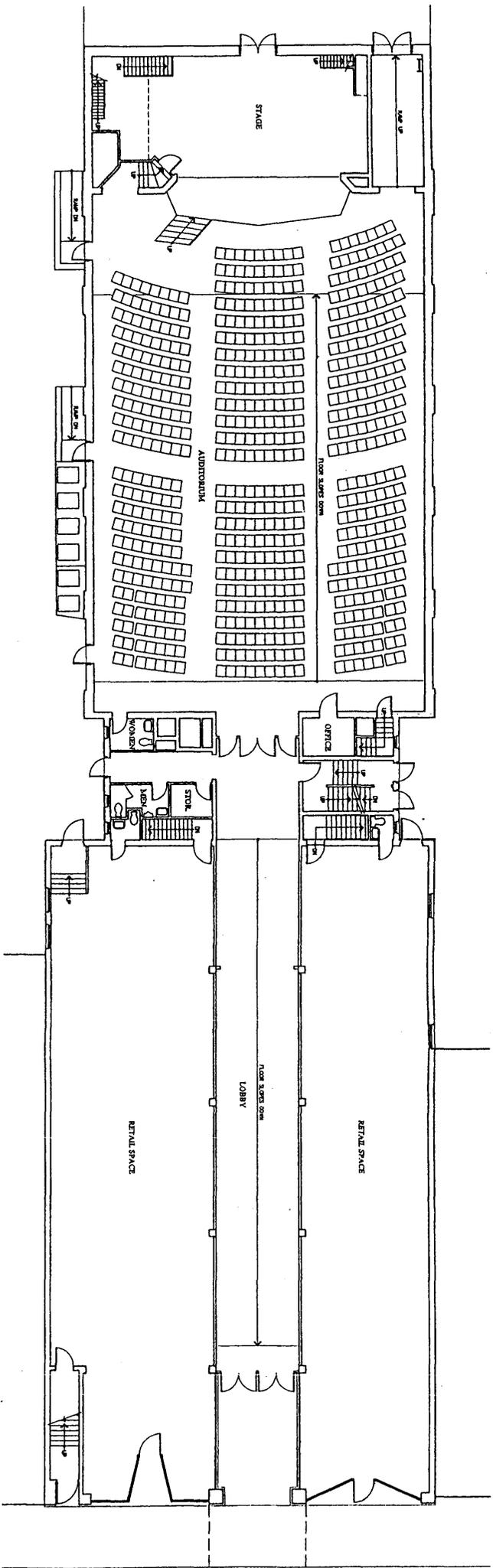


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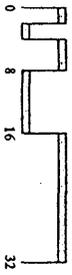


Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon Co.
Wisconsin



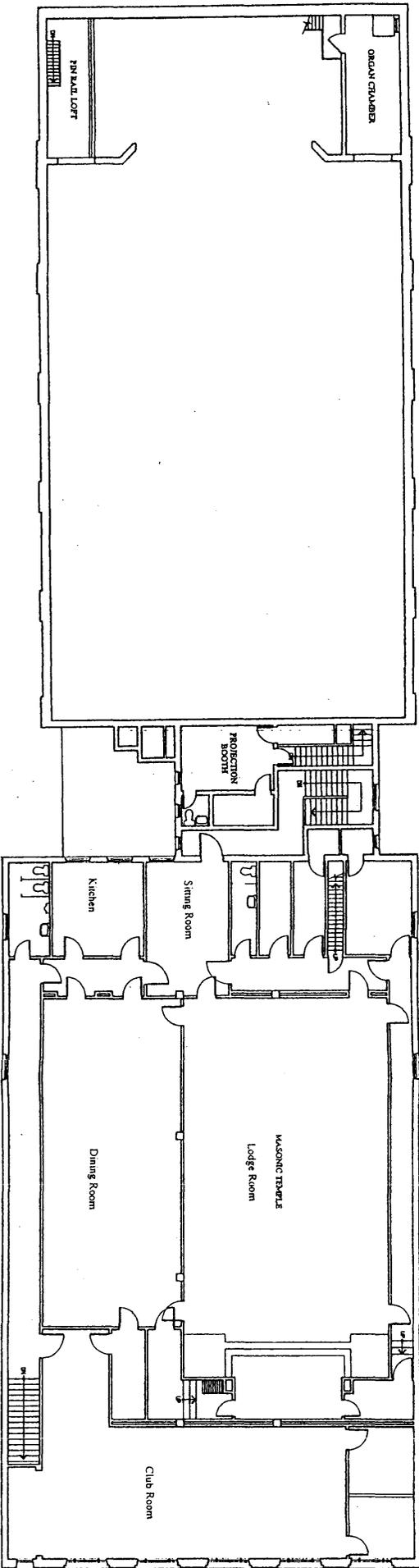


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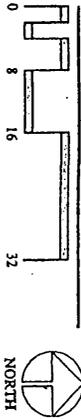


Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon Co.
Wisconsin





EXISTING
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



Masonic Temple Building
Viroqua, Vernon Co.
Wisconsin

