

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED NOV 05 1979
DATE ENTERED JAN 8 1980

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Vernon County Courthouse
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER North Dunlap Avenue (ca. 110)
southwest corner at W. Decker St. NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN Viroqua VICINITY OF Third CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE Wisconsin CODE 55 COUNTY Vernon CODE 123

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Vernon County
STREET & NUMBER
Vernon County Courthouse
CITY, TOWN Viroqua VICINITY OF Wisconsin STATE 54665

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Vernon County Register of Deeds
STREET & NUMBER
Vernon County Courthouse
CITY, TOWN Viroqua. Wisconsin STATE 54665

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places
DATE 1976 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS State Historical Society of Wisconsin
CITY, TOWN Madison Wisconsin STATE 53706

7 DESCRIPTION

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Vernon County Courthouse occupies a rectangle of land in the southwest corner of the intersection of South Dunlap Avenue and West Decker Street in downtown Viroqua. The main facade of the courthouse faces east. The site is 518 feet deep, east-to-west, and 264½ feet wide, north-to-south. The nomination includes this entire rectangle of land, constituting slightly more than three acres.

Across West Decker Street to the north of the courthouse itself are three houses, all of frame construction. At 406 West Decker is a red brick house, now used as a law office, with a hipped roof and segmentally-arched window openings. At 414 West Decker is a white clapboard vaguely-Georgian-Revival vernacular house with a porch having Ionic columns. The next house, 420 West Decker, is a two-story, hipped-roof house covered with asphalt siding.

The west end of the courthouse lot contains a parking lot, west of which is a city park with an open park shelter. To the south of the courthouse lot is undeveloped land that drops away steeply. Across Dunlap Street to the east are four clapboard vernacular houses of no particular architectural distinction.

The courthouse lot itself contains the original 1880 courthouse building, a later 1890s addition to its immediate west, and west of this addition a 1955 brick annex. Also on the lot is the sheriff's office and jail, with an eastern addition, both of red brick. A few feet west of the jail is a detached, one-car garage. The sheriff's office and jail probably was built in the first decade of the twentieth century, according to the sequence of Sanborn fire-insurance maps.

The 1880 courthouse is a two-story limestone building with a front, central three-story tower and belfry. The masonry is generally tooled ashlar, except that voussoirs in the segmental-pointed arched openings are finished smoothly, and the foundation walls, exposed for a half-level, are rock-faced limestone separated from the tooled-ashlar walls by a smooth shouldered belt-course. The main block of the courthouse has corner pilasters. The small east projection, the tower, and the west addition have raised limestone quoins. The 1890s west addition was built with matching masonry and matching openings. A simple front (east) porch rests on six clustered posts to cover the main entrance. The entry beneath has double doors, side lights, and a top light, all framed within a smooth segmentally-arched masonry opening. The hipped roof was and is covered with clay tiles. Recent red-brick chimneys replaced originals behind and to either side of the central belfry. A porch and entry also is on the south side of the 1890s west addition.

In 1955 a two-story, flat-roofed, yellow-brick addition was built to the west of the 1890s addition as an annex to the courthouse and connected to the older building by a one-story link. The public corridor, however, does not connect the annex to the courthouse. This addition is not significant and its demolition would be beneficial to the historical character of the courthouse.

The interior of the original courthouse is pedestrian, though apparently not drastically altered. The first floor contains a central east-west corridor lined by offices. The second floor has the large circuit court room, a jury room and the circuit judge's chambers. All walls on both floors have been painted institutional pastel greens, though woodwork was not removed, just painted over.

The best interior space is the circuit court room, which contains elaborate woodwork framing windows and doorways. Murals are found on the west, south, and east walls of the court room. The west mural is a colorful map of Vernon County with civil towns shown in a variety of colors. The south wall has, flanking an ornate central window, two seated female figures, the left holding the statutes, and the right holding a sword. Originally, the judge's bench was placed on center below the central window,

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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Vernon County Courthouse, Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

CONTINUATION SHEET

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7. DESCRIPTION (Continued)

thus being flanked by the two seated figures. The east wall mural, signed by Leighton Oylen, shows a settler and his family, accompanied by sheep, a dog, and an ox-drawn covered wagon, arriving at the shores of the Mississippi River in western Vernon County under the watchful gaze of three Native Americans. An orange rug covers the south half of the courtroom. A suspended acoustic-tile ceiling hides the original domed ceiling.

The original sheriff's office and jail building is somewhat Mediterranean in style, and has a red-clay-tile hipped roof. The north facade, over the main entry, has a segmentally-arched dormer window. The exterior material generally is a dark red brick with a white stucco band at the second-story level of the office portion. The recent, east addition is of a similar red brick, resting on a concrete-block foundation. Its hipped roof is covered with red asphalt shingles. The jail, housed in the west portion of this building, has barred windows. The present office and jail were built about 1910, according to Sanborn maps. The original office and jail, built with the courthouse in 1880, was demolished shortly after the new one was built. The 1911 Sanborn map of Viroqua shows both the original and new buildings being in existence simultaneously, though apparently only for a short period. The original office and jail were located directly north of the existing jail wing.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Powell, Elijah. Chairman Elijah Powell's Minutes Book of the Courthouse Building Committee - 1880. Unpublished manuscript.
- Union Publishing Company. History of Vernon County. Springfield, Ill., 1884. Page 162.
- Rogers, Earl M. Memoirs of Vernon County From the Earliest Historical Times Down to the Present. Madison: Western Historical Association, 1907. Pages 99-101.
- Roisland, Amy. "One Hundred Years of Progress," The Viroqua Centennial. Viroqua: Viroqua Centennial Committee, 1946. Unpaginated.

UTM NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3.15 Quadrangle: Viroqua, Wis. Scale: 1:62500
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1 5	6 7 0 1 8 0	4 8 2 4 5 8 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the southwest corner of the intersection of the rights of way of South Dunlap Avenue and West Decker Street, the property runs west 518 feet, then south 264½ feet, then east 518 feet, then north to the point of beginning.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jeff Dean, Director of Historic Preservation

May 29, 1979

ORGANIZATION

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

816 State Street

TELEPHONE

608-262-9504

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 X

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Richard Kuey

TITLE Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

10/29/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Charles D. Shuck

DATE

1-8-80

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Kristin O'Connell

DATE

1/8/80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Vernon County Courthouse, Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

The Vernon County Censor, an early Viroqua newspaper, reported in several 1880 articles the qualifications of C. F. Struck. "The architect, Mr. Struck," it reported on February 18, "is one of the best in the country, a gentleman of high character and reputation." Its opinion was not surprising, however, because the paper had editorialized strongly on behalf of building the new courthouse. Plans and specifications were advertised for bids on March 10, and on March 25 the general contracting bid of Ole Larson, La Crosse, was accepted. (Larson's bondsman, perhaps not surprisingly, was Mons Anderson of La Crosse.) The masons for the job were identified as John Benson, La Crosse, and William Lake, Viroqua. A later Censor comment on Struck noted, "Architect Struck has done some splendid work for Vernon County... He is a master of his profession, and we are glad to know his services are in large demand."

History. Viroqua was settled in 1847, three years before it was platted as the Village of Farwell. The name was changed to Viroqua in 1854, though its early development was very slow. In 1851 only three families lived there. Viroqua was designated the county seat in 1852 because of its central location, and in 1855 there were 350 inhabitants. In 1866 Viroqua was incorporated as a village. The railroad arrived at the village in 1879. The first train came in September of that year, resulting in a reported "monster jollification meeting." The railroad caused a marked expansion of the community, and it was incorporated as a city in 1885.

The courthouse, built in 1880, derives its primary associative significance from its century-long service to the residents of the county. Its construction was a key step in the evolution of Viroqua. To many area residents, it symbolizes the city's historical origins.

A singular historic event occurred on the courthouse grounds the night of June 1, 1888, when Andrew Grandstaff was lynched for allegedly murdering a couple and their two grandchildren at Readstown. Local residents, convinced he had committed the brutal ax-murders in spite of the elderly couple's frequent employment of his services, were aroused. Vernon County Sheriff Henry Gosling arrested Grandstaff at a county farm and held him in the county jail for trial. On the fateful night, a crowd of 200 angry citizens gathered at the jail-house door in a classic showdown. Local officials pleaded with those assembled to disperse. Instead, they overpowered Gosling's deputies and smashed open Grandstaff's cell door with a sledge hammer. He was dragged fighting and yelling to a large tree in front of the courthouse where he was hung from one of its limbs. It was the only lynching in Vernon County history. The tree, later mutilated by collectors, died. A small, flat, inscribed stone in the courthouse lawn marks the location of the lynching. (Note: the jail building associated with this event was demolished early in the twentieth century, as noted in the appearance statement in part 7.)

Art. The east mural, signed by Leighton Oyen, was probably painted in the 1920s. Oyen, son of Odin J. Oyen, took over as the head of his father's well-known La Crosse interior design and murals studio in 1922. Leighton was born in 1897 and raised in an artistic family. He studied art at the Chicago Institute of Art c. 1911-1912, at the New York National Academy of Design in 1919, and the New York Art Student League from 1920 to 1921, after which he returned to La Crosse when Odin Oyen's chief artist-designer died. The firm closed in 1931, so it was during this nine-year period when the Vernon County mural had to have been painted.

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Continued)

Wolfram, Mrs. R. E. "Stone on Courthouse Lawn Marks Vernon's Only Lynching in 1888,"
La Crosse Sunday Tribune, June 20, 1965. Page 19.
Vernon County Censor. February 18, March 10, and March 31, 1880.

Rausch, Joan M., A Catalog of the Oyen Collection, (La Crosse: Univ. of Wisconsin,
1979), 17.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

PROPERTY NAME: Vernon County Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: WISCONSIN, Vernon

DATE RECEIVED: 1/06/03 DATE OF PENDING LIST:
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/20/03
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 80000200

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 2/14/03 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

~~Additional Documentation~~ Accepted

RECOM. / CRITERIA

REVIEWER

Edson Beall

DISCIPLINE

Historian

TELEPHONE

DATE

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Vernon County Courthouse
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Period of Significance

1880-1930

When the Vernon County Courthouse was listed in 1980, the full scope of the period of significance was not checked off in the general span of dates used at the time. This continuation sheet seeks to correct the period to reflect the areas of significance detailed in the text, as well as to incorporate resources clearly meant to be contributing, but falling outside of the defined period.

The corrected period is 1880-1930. This period includes the construction of all contributing buildings and the execution of the murals within the courthouse. Section 7 discusses the contributing sheriff's office and jail. Section 8 includes a discussion of the murals, with Art checked as an area of significance. The period of significance begins with the construction of the courthouse in 1880 and ends with the date by which the murals were known to have been executed.

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alicia L. Cochran
Signature of certifying official/Title

January 31, 2003
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin
State or Federal agency and bureau