

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



984

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

1. Name

historic W.A. Roosevelt Company

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 230 North Front Street not for publication

city, town La Crosse vicinity of congressional district

state Wisconsin code 55 county La Crosse code 063

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name James M. and Mary Jane Brindley

street & number 3442 Ebner Coulee Road

city, town La Crosse vicinity of state Wisconsin 54601

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, La Crosse County Courthouse

street & number 400 North 4th Street

city, town La Crosse state Wisconsin 54601

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State Street

city, town Madison state Wisconsin

# 7. Description

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

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

The W.A. Roosevelt Company facility consists of the five-story warehouse and office building, and the one-story pipe shed to the east. The 70x100-foot rectangular main building of brown "art brick" rises five full stories above ground from the exposed basement. (Paler brick at the northwest corner marks the portion of the building rebuilt after partial foundation collapse in 1965.) On all elevations, colossal compound segmental arches, framing triplets of multi-paned windows, span four stories above the first-story base of the building, defined horizontally by stone courses. A matching coping follows the "castellated" roofline, above contrasting off-white terra cotta panels which suggest capitals above flat brick "piers" created by the recessed window arcading. The original copper and glass canopy is still suspended over the ground-level entrance on the west side, marking the location of the self-contained stairwell and elevator shaft inside. Most of the loading dock along the south side (rear) is original. A small addition (1972) at the southeast corner connects the main building to the adjoining one-story brick pipe shed. The facade of the 60x100-foot rectangle, with its pantile-covered roof, is composed of a center freight door and transom, framed by engaged brick piers, and topped by blind lancets in the gable end overhead; wide brick piers at the corners rise as "shoulders" at the sides of the gable. A low concrete foundation and roofline coping trim the walls.

Except for the office spaces at the west end of the second floor, and stairway and elevator shaft, the interior of each floor of the warehouse is a single large space with wood ceilings and laminated wood floors, supported by heavy wood timbers and concrete columns (in the basement) or wood columns (upper floors). Offices are composed of painted plaster ceilings and walls, linoleum-covered floors, and suspended florescent light fixtures (1950s-60s vintage). Stairs are of steel with simple ornamentation. Elements of the interior are not considered significant. The interior of the pipe shed is one large space, formerly divided into pipe storage stalls by vertical metal supports.

The metal shed ("Butler building") eighty feet to the south of the main building is not considered significant to the nomination.

The W.A. Roosevelt Company building is located on a paved lot at the corner of Vine and Front streets, adjacent to Riverside Park along the Mississippi River bank in La Crosse. The "Freight House" (NRHP 1982) of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad located across Vine St. on the north, once served the light industries of the area. Both the immediate industrial corridor and the northwest edge of the central business district several blocks to the east have suffered from scattered demolition; in this irregular environment, the Roosevelt Company building is a highly-visible landmark.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
Period of Significance: 1916-1933		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		
<b>Specific dates</b>	1916 <sup>1</sup>	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Parkinson and Dockendorff <sup>2</sup>	

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The W.A. Roosevelt Company building is architecturally significant as one of La Crosse's best extant examples of its type and period of construction. The five-story building/warehouse, with its full-height window arcading and terra cotta ornament, is a simple expression of Chicago School/Commercial design of the early twentieth century. The building, with adjoining one-story pipe shed, was designed by regionally significant architects Parkinson & Dockendorff. Commercially, the building represents the post-lumbering era in La Crosse, when wholesale trade and distribution on a regional scale rose to substantial importance in the local economy.

## ARCHITECTURE

Active from 1902 until 1952, the firm of Albert E. Parkinson and Bernard J. Dockendorff of La Crosse, specialists in church, school and hospital design, was credited with the design of over eight hundred public buildings alone.<sup>3</sup> Bernard Dockendorff (born 1878) worked for two years in his late teens with La Crosse architects Stoltze & Schick, then spent two years studying architecture at the Technicum in Darnstadt, Germany, and another four years in the tutelage of Professor Ludwig Becker of Mayence.<sup>4</sup> In 1902, Dockendorff joined in partnership with Albert Parkinson, a native of England (born 1870), who was trained by his father and "in schools in Scranton."<sup>5</sup> The firm was licensed to practice in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, and Illinois, and its busy office was said to be a training ground for many young regional architects.<sup>6</sup> Their commissions include a number of schools, residences, hospitals, and commercial structures in their home city of La Crosse, as well as in most cities of central and western Wisconsin;<sup>7</sup> their Marquette County Courthouse (1916) was listed in the National Register in 1982. The firm also designed the Saltzer Seed Company building, the one other structure in La Crosse of the same period, scale and use, and of comparable (but less distinctive) design. Their association ended with their deaths in September of 1952.

Of the nearly-completed Roosevelt building, the La Crosse Tribune of November 28, 1916, said, "It looks more like a big school building, or a library, than the prosaic repository of iron pipe and bath-room fixtures, does the splendid new building of the W.A. Roosevelt Company.....It is built on what is for La Crosse an entirely new principle of construction - laminated wood flooring.....They are each, practically speaking, a solid block of wood. The effect is as if each were a thick and heavy slab sawed cross-section-wise from the body of some fabulous tree."<sup>8</sup> The five-story "tower" and adjoining vernacular commercial pipe shed remain virtually unaltered since construction, and represent one era and aspect of architectural design in an industrial and trade center which has suffered considerable loss through alteration and demolition.

(continued)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Holmes, Fred, ed. Wisconsin: Stability, Progress, Beauty. Vol. V. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1946, pp. 318-319.  
La Crosse Tribune, November 28, 1916.  
Miller, Stanley N., "A History of La Crosse," unpublished PhD dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1959.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name La Crescent, Minnesota-Wisconsin

Quadrangle scale 1:62,500

### UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1, 2, 3, Block 9, Town of La Crosse, La Crosse County, Wisconsin.

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

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Diane H. Filipowicz/Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of Wisconsin

date June, 1982; April, 1983

street & number 816 State Street

telephone 608/262-2732

city or town Madison

state Wisconsin 53706

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Director, Historic Preservation Division

date JAN. 10, 1984

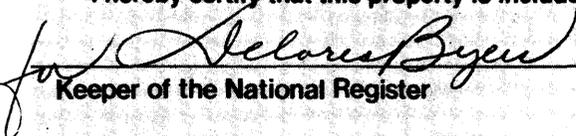
### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

2/16/84

for   
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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

W.A. ROOSEVELT COMPANY, LA CROSSE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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For NPS use only

received

date entered

COMMERCE

One of the last remaining structures associated with wholesale trade in La Crosse in the early twentieth century, the W. A. Roosevelt Company building is an important link with a significant phase of the city's economic history. Established in the late 1860s by one-time Mississippi River boat captain and La Crosse mayor W. A. Roosevelt ("a cousin of the mighty T. R."), the small steam-fitting and plumbing supply company originally served the saw-mills and raft boats of the lumber era.<sup>10</sup> But the rise in Roosevelt's fortunes came in the late 1880s when the firm devoted its resources to the wholesale distribution of plumbing and heating apparatus.<sup>11</sup> The first (and largest) such firm in the city, Roosevelt capitalized on the rise of modern plumbing systems as well as the emergence of a well-integrated rail network which linked La Crosse with the rest of the region.<sup>12</sup> By the early twentieth century, the company's sales dramatically increased,<sup>13</sup> and a 1908 business survey of the community indicated that the Roosevelt Company maintained "extensive business throughout the northwest."<sup>14</sup> By 1915, the firm added electrical supplies to its inventory of iron pipes, plumbing supplies, boilers, bathtubs, windmills, steam-fitting supplies, and heating equipment. Although the company occupied a series of buildings in its early years, the construction of the new building in 1916—complete with railroad spur, interior truck paths, and conveyor system—testified to the burgeoning business of the firm.<sup>15</sup>

The Roosevelt Company's success was emblematic of the booming wholesale industry in the city. Located at the confluence of rail and river, La Crosse merchants at the turn of the century seized the opportunities of their location and the city emerged as a regionally important wholesale center. Concurrently with the decline of the lumber industry, wholesale trade in the city generally tripled between 1890 and 1905, growing from five to nearly fifteen million dollars.<sup>16</sup> By 1900, the city boasted over fifty major jobbing firms, serving a market area which embraced parts of Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas, as well as Wisconsin.<sup>17</sup>

The growth of the Roosevelt Company clearly reflected those important changes in the city's economy. Not only did its business extend across state lines, the company continually outstripped its La Crosse competition in the twentieth century<sup>18</sup>—a notable achievement in light of U.S. Census reports which indicated that wholesale plumbing was a significant element of the city's economy.<sup>19</sup> But the importance of the Roosevelt Company building transcends the firm's status as a leading wholesaler. While the structures of other wholesale firms from the period have been disfigured or demolished, the Roosevelt building stands as the best (and one of the few remaining) examples of the great warehouse buildings which once formed a substantial part of the region's economic base.

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Continuation sheet

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 "New Construction Used in \$80,000 Roosevelt Plant," La Crosse Tribune, November 26, 1916, n.p.
- 2 Original plans, in possession of current owner.
- 3 La Crosse Tribune, September 21, 1952.
- 4 Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing, Examining Board of Architects and Professional Engineers, Series 1591, Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Dockendorff, Bernard J.," Biographical Files, Area Research Center, Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "New Construction Used in \$80,000 Roosevelt Plant," La Crosse Tribune, November 28, 1916.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Yesterday and Today: 1868-1918 ([La Crosse]: [privately published for W. A. Roosevelt Company], [1918], n.p.
- 11 "New Construction Used in \$80,000 Roosevelt Plant."
- 12 See Wright's Directory of La Crosse for 1917, (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Co., 1917), pp. 29-30.
- 13 "New Construction Used in \$80,000 Roosevelt Plant."
- 14 Wisconsin and Northwest Trade Journal, December, 1908 (Vol. 2, No. 12), p. 12.
- 15 Yesterday and Today: 1868-1918, n.p.
- 16 Stanley N. Miller, "A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin," unpublished PhD dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, August, 1959.
- 17 See Philippi's Souvenir Directory of the City of La Crosse, (La Crosse: L. P. Philippi Co., 1900), pp. 42-43.
- 18 See Wright's Directory of La Crosse for 1917, pp. 29-30, for discussion of Roosevelt Company and its competitor, the La Crosse Plumbing Company, founded in 1898.
- 19 See Sixteenth Census of the U.S.: Census of Business 1939, Vol. II: Wholesale Trade, pp. 948-949 and Fred Holmes, ed., Wisconsin: Stability, Progress, Beauty, Vol. V, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1946), p. 319.