

**City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (1)**

Name of Building or Site

Common Name

Historic Name (if applicable)

Argus Building/Heilmann Block

Argus Building

Location

Street Address

Aldermanic District

121 E. Main St.

District 6

Classification

Type of Property (building, monument, park, etc.)

Building

Zoning District

Present Use

C4

Restaurant/Tavern

Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's Office)

Name(s)

121-123 East Main Street Limited Partnership

Street Address

Telephone Number

Post Office Box 1601, Madison WI 53701

Legal Description (available at City Assessor's Office)

Parcel Number

Legal Description

0709-133-2726-3

NE 48 feet of Lot 1, Block 103,
Original Plat

Condition of Property

Physical Condition (excellent, good, fair, deteriorated, ruins)

Very Good

Altered or Unaltered?

Moved or Original Site?

Exterior altered when building enlarged in 1891-92, interior greatly altered at this time, again in 1910, and again recently.

Original Site

Wall Construction

Exterior was constructed of red brick.

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

Historical Data

Original Owner

Original Use

Simeon Mills

newspaper office/meeting hall

Architect or Builder

Architectural Style

Unknown

Romanesque Revival

Date of Construction

Indigenous Materials Used

ca. 1844 - 1847; remodeled in 1891-1892

not applicable

List of Bibliographical References Used

City of Madison Real Estate Tax Rolls.

Durrie, Daniel S. *A History of Madison and The Four Lakes Country*. Madison: 1874.

Holzheuter, John O. (Ed.). *Madison During the Civil War; A Portfolio of Rare Photographs by John S. Fuller, 1860-1863*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1997.

Madison Past & Present: 1852-1902. Madison: Wisconsin State Journal Co., 1902.

Rankin, Katherine R. and Timothy F. Heggland. *Madison Intensive Survey Report*. Madison: City of Madison Department of Planning and Development, 1997.

Wisconsin State Journal, December 2, 1891; December 10, 1892; May 12, 1910.

Form Prepared By

Name and Title

Timothy F. Heggland/consultant

Organization Represented (if any)

Department of Planning and Development

Address

Telephone Number

6391 Hillsandwoods Rd., Mazomanie, WI 53560

608-795-2650

Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

August 31, 2001

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance.

The Argus Building has the distinction of being one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, surviving commercial building in Madison. The original part of the building was a two-story, rectilinear Greek Revival building that was constructed out of red brick between 1844 and 1847. It is located on the south corner of the intersection formed by the northwest-southeast-running S. Webster Street and the northeast-southwest running E. Main Street. This location is just a block from the Capitol Square and in the heart of the earliest commercial district in Madison that formed around the King Street corner to the square. Subsequently, the building was expanded and modernized between 1891 and 1892, at which time it was given the Romanesque Revival appearance that it still retains today, thanks to a thorough and respectful restoration in the 1990s.

Because of the recent discovery of a ca. 1860 photograph by Madison photographer John S. Fuller, we now have photographic evidence of what the original appearance of the Argus Building was. As noted above, the original Argus Building was a two-story rectilinear side-gabled variant of the Greek Revival style. Its asymmetrical five-bay main facade faced northwest onto E. Main Street. The building originally had a raised basement story. The main facade had two visible window openings in this story that were positioned in the base of the first and second bays from the left. Each of the bays had a nine-over-nine double-hung wood sash window placed in both the first and second stories, the only exception being the first story of the right-hand bay, which contained the main entrance to the building. This entrance had a transom above it and was accessed by climbing a short flight of stairs. The entire building was sheltered by a side-gabled roof whose gable ends featured returned eaves, and four chimney stacks were visible on the roof, two in the front and two in the back.

So far as is known, the Argus Building retained this general appearance until 1891, when the then owner, George Heilmann, began a two-year expansion and improvement program that resulted in the building that exists today. Heilmann's expansion of the original building also utilized red brick for the exterior walls. It retained the width and two-story height of the original building, but it more than doubled the building's depth and created a considerably larger rectilinear building. This expansion also resulted in a S. Webster Street elevation that grew from three to seven-bays-wide. One can still see the dividing line between the original building and the 1891 addition today if one looks closely at the S. Webster Street elevation. In addition, the 1891 remodeling modernized the appearance of the building as well and gave it the Romanesque Revival appearance it still has today. This remodeling involved the removal of the original gable roof, which was replaced with a slightly sloping roof hidden by a new tall corbelled brick parapet wall. In addition, the main facade was also greatly altered as well. To begin with, the entire original first story was replaced with two cast iron storefronts that featured large plate glass display windows flanking recessed and canted entrances. The entrance of the left-hand storefront was located in the corner position and that of the right-hand storefront was centered on that storefront. In addition, the entrance to the upper story was placed in between the two storefronts; both storefronts and the second story entrance were all placed under a cast iron cornice that spanned the width of the facade. In addition, the original five-bay second story of this facade was changed to a seven-bay design, with each bay consisting of a single rectangular window opening that contained a one-over-one double-hung window. Additional interest was given to the facade by placing full-width rock-faced stone stringcourses above and below the second story windows at the level of the headers and the sills.

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That the Argus Building still retains its 1890s appearance today is due largely to a recent restoration of the building that took place in the early 1990s. This restoration restored the 1890s storefronts to close to their original appearance, replaced the existing second story windows of the main facade and all those on the side elevation with modern equivalents of the same design, and thoroughly upgraded and modernized all the utilities and other aspects of the building. In addition, the interior of the building has also been renovated as well. The first story is now divided into two separate stores, this being the arrangement that also characterized the building for most of its historic existence. The Argus Bar that occupies the corner storefront is an effective recreation of an 1890s interior, although not the ones that originally occupied this space

The overall result is one of the most successful restorations of a nineteenth century commercial building in downtown Madison. The Argus Building is now one of the downtown's finest examples of this highly endangered building type.

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria.

The Argus Building is a fine example of the vernacular Romanesque Revival style. It is now one of the most intact late nineteenth century commercial buildings in downtown Madison as well, thanks to a fine early 1990s restoration. More importantly, though, the Argus Building is also probably the oldest surviving commercial building in the city, the original portion having been built ca.1844-1847. As a consequence, almost everything that happened in the building prior to its 1891 remodeling is of significance to the history of the city and much that happened there later is of historic significance as well.

The original portion of the Argus Building is known to have been in existence in 1847. It is believed to have been built by Simeon Mills (1810-1895), an important pioneer Madison real estate developer and entrepreneur. Mills, who was responsible for developing most of the rest of this block as well and whose name is given to the National Register Historic District that encompasses the block, was one of the three original publishers of the *Wisconsin Argus* newspaper (along with John Y. Smith and Benjamin Holt). The paper was first published in Madison in 1844 by S. Mills & Co. and was the fourth newspaper to be started in the city. It was a weekly paper that did well at first but faltered after losing the government printing contract. In 1852 it merged with the *Wisconsin Democrat*, which became Madison's first daily. The paper folded in 1856 but was resurrected for a while, finally stopping print ca. 1861. The office where this is paper was located was situated in the Argus Building and it continued to be printed and edited out of this building, despite changes in ownership and editorial control, until at least 1860, when the John S. Fuller photo of the building was taken. Consequently, the Argus Building is now the oldest surviving building in the city that is associated with newspaper publishing.

In addition, the Argus building is also the oldest surviving building in the city to have served as a home for the fraternal orders that were once a highly important part of Madison's social life. The second story of the building was especially fitted up as a meeting hall by E. B. Dean, Jr. ca. 1846-1847, who rented it to Madison Lodge No. 5 of the A. F. & A. M. (Masonic Lodge). The Masons were the first fraternal order in Madison, having been organized in 1844, and had first met in the first State Capitol (non-extant) from 1844-1846, then moved to the United States Hotel building (non-extant), at the corner of S. Pinckney and E. Main Streets, before moving to the Argus Building. Due to their poor financial condition, the Masons were soon obliged to surrender their lease to the Odd Fellows Lodge, which held its first meeting in the Argus Building on June 15, 1847. The Odd Fellows continued to occupy this hall for some years thereafter before they finally moved to larger quarters. Thus, the Argus building is also now the oldest building in the city to be associated with the meetings of the city's first fraternal orders.

In 1874, the building changed hands and the new owner was George Heilmann (1847-19??), a native of Bavaria who came to Wisconsin with his parents in 1854. Heilmann eventually became a baker and worked in several baking establishments in Illinois and Wisconsin before moving to Madison in 1873. In 1874, Heilmann purchased the Argus Building and there established his own bakery, known as the Madison Steam Bakery, which he operated in conjunction with an associated lunch room/restaurant for the rest of his life.

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In 1891, emboldened by the success of what had become by then Madison's largest bakery, Heilmann decided to modernize and expand his quarters. The project was completed over a period of two years at a cost of about \$9000 and resulted in the building that is visible today. The newly expanded building was known as the "Heilmann Block" and Heilmann's bakery occupied the right-hand store space while the left-hand store was occupied by a saloon, as it had been since at least 1877. In 1902 the bakery baked 1500 – 1800 loaves of bread and 300 dozen rolls per day and the restaurant served an average of 110 lunches each day. Heilmann's bakery continued in operation even after his death and it continued to occupy its space in this building even after 1927, when the baking operations themselves were moved to larger quarters at the corner of S. Ingersoll St. and East Washington Ave. (extant). As a consequence, the Argus Building has the distinction of having served continuously as a bakery for over 56 years, the longest tenure of a bakery at any one location in the city prior to World War II.

Thus, not only is the Argus Building a fine example of nineteenth century vernacular Romanesque Revival design but it also occupies a special place in the history of Madison for being the city's oldest commercial building, its oldest newspaper office, and its oldest fraternal lodge meeting place. In addition, the Argus Building is also of significance as the nineteenth century building with the longest association with the theme of baking, a usage that spans both the original and the current appearance of the building.

The Argus Building/Heilmann Block was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987 as a contributing resource within the Simeon Mills Historic District.