

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

Name of Building or Site

Common Name

Nora Cate Schaeffer House

Historic Name (if applicable)

Louis & Catherine Nelson House

Location

Street Address

504 East Main Street

Aldermanic District

Six

Classification

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

Building

Zoning District

R5

Present Use

Single-family residence

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

Name(s)

Nora Cate Schaeffer

Street Address

504 East Main Street

Telephone Number

255-4416

Legal Description (available at City Assessor's Office)

Parcel Number

0709-133-1604-2

Legal Description

NE 33 ft of SW 99 ft Lot 8 and NE 33 ft of
SW 99 ft of SE 1/2 Lot 9, Block 116,
Original Plat

Condition of Property

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

Excellent

Altered or Unaltered?

Mostly Unaltered

Moved or Original Site?

Original site

Wall Construction

Masonry

City of Madison
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

Historical Data

Original Owner

Louis Nelson

Original Use

Single-family house

Architect or Builder

Unknown

Architectural Style

Front Gable

Date of Construction

1881

Indigenous Materials Used

Local brick

List of Bibliographical References Used

Madison Building Permits. Madison Department of Planning and Development.

Madison City Directory. Madison: G. R. Angell & Co., 1914; and 1916.

Madison City Directory. Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company; 1921 and 1925.

Madison City Directory: 1883. Madison: W.F. Curtis & Co., 1883.

Madison Tax Rolls. Madison Department of Planning and Development.

Map of Madison. Pelham, New York: Sanborn Publishing Company, 1885; 1892; 1898; 1902; 1908 and 1942 pasted over through 1959.

Mollenhoff, David V. *Madison: A History of the Formative Years*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1982.

Morrissey & Bunn's Madison City Directory: 1880-81. Madison: Morrissey & Bunn, 1880.

Pryor's Madison City Directory: 1877-78. Madison: Pryor & Co., 1877.

Rankin, Katherine H. *Intensive Survey of the Historic Resources of Madison*, prepared for the Madison Department of Planning and Development and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1994.

Schaeffer, Nora Cate. Current owner. Personal communication, March 4, 2001.

Wright's Madison City Directory. Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1927; 1929; 1931; 1937; 1939; 1943; 1947; 1951; 1954 and 1960.

Wright's Madison City Directory. St. Paul, Minnesota: Wright Directory Company, 1963; and 1966.

Form Prepared By

Name and Title

Elizabeth L. Miller, Historic Preservation Consultant

Organization Represented (if any)

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Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

March, 2001

Landmarks Commission

LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance.

The Nelson House is a two-story, Front Gable building of load-bearing brick construction. It is located southeast of the Capitol Square in a neighborhood that mixes mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century residences with commercial and institutional structures from the mid-to-late twentieth century. A gravel driveway runs just west of the house.

Erected in 1881, the Nelson House sits on a fieldstone rubble basement.¹ The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. A simple cornice and a stone watertable enrich the structure.

The south-facing (front) façade of the house is three bays wide and displays an off-center front door. Wood, double-hung sash windows appear in the two openings east of the door and in the three openings at the second story. The first floor windows are one-over-one replacements, while those at the second floor are two-over-two originals. The openings exhibit stone sills and segmental-arched hood moldings. An oculus appears in the gable end. A portico with fluted posts and a broad though simple entablature shelters the front door. Although the portico was constructed in 1987, it was designed by Gary Tipler to be compatible with the historic character of the Nelson House. By 1885, and perhaps originally, the house had a full-façade, frame porch.² The front porch was partially enclosed prior to 1959, and had lost its historic appearance.³

There is a brick section at the back of the house that is one-and-one-half stories high and is not quite as wide as the front section. This section is either original to the house or added shortly thereafter; it appears on the 1885 Sanborn *Map of Madison*. The rear section is gabled, and the rear facade exhibits one large window at the first story and one large window at the second story. Both of these windows are two-over-two. As early as 1885, a narrow two-story porch was attached to the west side of the rear section. This porch was removed in 2000 and a two-story, frame porch is currently under construction. Within the porch, a door into the rear wing and a two-over-two window with stone lintel and sill can be seen. The east side of the rear wing has one two-over-two window on the first story and one small fixed window on the second story.

The east-facing façade of the main block has three openings at the first story and two at the second story. Most hold original, two-over-two windows and all have plain stone lintels and sills. Two two-pane window also appear in the basement.

On the west-facing façade of the main block there are two original openings with double-hung sash (two-over-two) with plain stone lintels and sills at each floor. A small one-over-one window with a brick sill, not original to the house, also appears. Two window openings can be found in the basement as well.

¹ Tax rolls, City of Madison, on file, Department of Planning and Development.

² *Map of Madison*, (Pelham, New York: Sanborn Publishing Company, 1885).

³ *Map of Madison*, (Pelham, New York: Sanborn Publishing Company, 1942 pasted over through 1959).

Landmarks Commission

LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

Significance of the Nominated Property

The Nelson House is eligible for Madison Landmark designation because it meets criterion 3 of the Landmarks and Landmarks Sites Designation Criteria (see Madison Ordinances Sec. 33.01(4)(a)). Specifically, it is a good and intact example of a Front Gable house, a vernacular form with few early intact brick examples remaining in Madison. Although the front portico is not original, it was patterned after porticos of the era in which the house was built and is compatible with the historic character of the Nelson House.

Architectural Significance

The Front Gable form was built between about 1840 and 1925. It is rectangular in plan with a gable roof, the gable end of which faces toward the street. Residential examples are typically small or medium in size and display simple ornamentation. For early examples (that is, prior to 1890), corner and cornice boards are typical while later examples may exhibit shingling in the gable ends and a cottage window with a leaded glass header on the front-facing facade. Later examples tend to be taller and narrower than earlier Front Gable houses. The intensive survey of Madison identified 100 Front Gable residences erected prior to 1890, 19 of them brick. The Nelson House is one of the most intact of these. As one of the best and most intact early examples of a brick, Front Gable house, the Nelson House is eligible for designation as a Madison Landmark.

History of the Louis and Catherine Nelson House

This house was constructed for the Nelsons in 1881. They had lived in an earlier house on the site from 1868 until this house was completed.⁴ Louis Nelson worked as a clerk at Dunning and Sumner's grocery from at least 1866 until purchasing a grocery store with B. M. Benson in 1874. The Nelson and Benson grocery was located at 119 East Main Street. Nelson bought out Benson by 1877 and continued to operate the grocery store, one of the largest in Madison, until his death in 1886.⁵ Louis' widow, Catherine, continued to live in the house until selling to Otto and Bertha Schroeder in 1921. Otto Schroeder was an engineer on the Chicago and North Western Railway.⁶ In 1926, Otto and Vida (or Viola) Wolf acquired the property. Otto Wolf had a three-stall, concrete block garage erected behind the house the same year.⁷ Through the 1930s, Wolf operated an auto repair shop (demolished 1972).⁸ Wolf worked as a machinist in the 1940s, and as a toolmaker for Oscar Mayer during the 1950s.⁹ Around 1932, Wolf converted the house into two units.¹⁰ Wolf

4 Tax rolls, City of Madison, on file, Department of Planning and Development.

5 Historic Preservation file, City of Madison, Department of Planning and Development.

6 Tax rolls; and *Madison City Directory*, (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1921).

7 Building permit, City of Madison, on file, Department of Planning and Development.

8 *Wright's Madison City Directory*, (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1927; 1929; 1931; 1937; and 1939); and building permit.

9 *Wright's Madison City Directory*, (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1943; 1947; 1951; 1954 and 1960).

10 *Wright's Madison City Directory*, (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1931 and 1937).

owned the property until at least 1966. By 1968, Robert Sweeney had purchased the house. Sweeney converted the building into three units. In 1982, Stephen Brokish owned the property, returning it to a two-unit configuration and selling to Gerald Wager in 1983. By 1987, Don Griffin had become the owner.¹¹ The current owner, Nora Cate Schaeffer, acquired the house in 1991.¹² It was converted to a single family house in 1995-1996.

¹¹ Building permits.

¹² Nora Cate Schaeffer, Personal Communication, March 4, 2001.

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