

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

Name of Building or Site

Common Name

Historic Name (if applicable)

Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Co.
office building

same

Location

Street Address

Aldermanic District

1344 E. Washington Avenue

second

Classification

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

building

Zoning District

Present Use

C3

restaurant

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

Name(s)

J. T. Mullins Rev Trust, J. and C. Mullins, Trustees

Street Address

Telephone Number

401 N. Carroll Street 53703

257-0681

Legal Description (available at City Assessor's Office)

Parcel Number

Legal Description

0709-131-0213-6

SE 147 feet of Lots 10 and 11 and SE 147 feet of NE 11 feet of Lot 12, Block 217, Original Plat, aka Farwells Replat

Condition of Property

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

excellent

Altered or Unaltered?

altered

Wall Construction

brick

Moved or Original Site?

original site

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

Historical Data
Original Owner

Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Company

Architect or Builder

unknown

Date of Construction

1885, with additions ca. 1892 and 1909

Original Use

industrial office

Architectural Style

neo-classical revival

Indigenous Materials Used

not applicable

List of Bibliographical References Used

Brown, Edgar A. "Fuller-Johnson Firm Pioneer and Leader in Engine Industry," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 27 February 1927.

Building permits for 1344 E. Washington Avenue. Available at the City of Madison Planning Department, Madison, WI.

Fuller & Johnson Manufacturing Company Records. Available at Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI.

Individual site file for 1344 E. Washington Avenue. Available at the City of Madison Planning Department, Madison, WI.

Kindschi, Verne W. *The Fuller & Johnson Story: A Brief History of the Fuller & Johnson Manufacturing Company*. Madison, WI: American Printing Company, n.d.

Madison City Directory. Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1935-1974. See individual footnotes for specific citations.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

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

Rankin, Katherine H. and Timothy Heggland. *Madison Intensive Survey*. Prepared for the City of Madison and the Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (1995).

Rankin, Katherine H. and Elizabeth Miller. *The Historic Resources of Downtown Madison*. Prepared for the City of Madison (1998).

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps--Madison, Wisconsin. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885, 1892.

Wisconsin State Journal (Madison, WI), 31 December 1885, 11 January 1910.

"Wisconsin's Internet Restaurant Guide--Fyfe's Corner Bistro." Material on-line available at www.foodspot.com/yfes/coupon.html. Accessed 31 August 2001.

Wyatt, Barbara, ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*. 3 vols. Madison, WI: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

Form Prepared By
Name and Title

Brain Faltinson, consultant and Katherine H. Rankin, preservation planner

Organization Represented (if any)

Madison Landmarks Commission

Address

215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Telephone Number

608-266-6552

Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

September, 2002

Landmarks Commission

LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance.

The former Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company office building is situated on the west corner of the intersection of E. Washington Avenue and N. Dickinson Street. While the surrounding neighborhood retains its historic industrial and commercial character, the majority of the neighboring buildings have been altered with additions as well as modern sidings and fenestration.

Office Building (1885, ca. 1892, 1909)¹

Oriented on a southwest/northeast axis, this former office building is constructed of brick and represents three distinct periods of construction. The original 1885 block is a small, two-story, hipped-roof, ell-shaped structure with a one-story, truncated hipped-roof addition (circa 1892) fitted within the east ell juncture. Both of these roofs are covered with asphalt shingles. A dominant, two-story, flat-roof block (1909) is joined to the original block's left (southwest) facade. Throughout the entire building, ornamentation is modest and generally is limited to ornamental stonework surrounding the regularly spaced, original, wooden, sash fenestration.

The circa-1892 section located at the immediate corner of E. Washington and N. Dickinson is defined by a gabled wall dormer on the main (southeast) facade which carries a two-over-two, wooden sash. The two visible walls (southeast and northeast) are pierced by tall, one-over-one, double-hung sashes located in openings formed by stone sills and lintels. Each lintel is scored with three horizontal bands. Three windows are located on the main facade and one is on the northeast. A modern entry door also exists on the northeast elevation. The block's only noticeable ornamentation is a plain, wooden cornice and carved brackets within the eaves.

The main (southwest) facade of the central, ell-shaped 1885 block carries three, regularly spaced, double-hung sashes on each level. Each opening is defined by stone sills and lintels. The block's rear (northwest) elevation consists of the two-story main wing as well as the one-story ell projection. Fenestration is similar to the main facade with the first level containing five sashes and the upper story pierced by three. A modern entry is also evident. Meanwhile, the wing projection's gabled end wall protrudes slightly past the sidewall of the 1892 block. It exhibits a single, double-hung sash.

The dominant part of the structure is the neoclassical flat-roofed addition (1909). Located near its right corner on the main (northeast) facade is the building's main entrance. It features a classical

¹Individual site file for 1344 E. Washington Avenue, Available at the City of Madison Planning Department, Madison, WI; *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps--Madison, Wisconsin* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885, 1892); *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), 31 December 1885, 11 January 1910.

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surround consisting of brick columns supporting an ornate, stone, broken pediment that carries a central ball ornament. Other decorative attributes of this block consist of a stone watertable, a plain metal cornice, a plain brick parapet topped with a metal/tile cap, and raised-brick quoining on the south corner. The fenestration consists of regularly spaced, one-over-one, double-hung sashes. Those on the first floor are fitted within segmentally arched openings while the upper-level exhibits rectangular openings. All of these openings are topped with lintels composed of a central masonry keystone, staggered soldier brick and stone trim.

The southwest end wall is austere and is pierced by a modern, metal entry door and a single, double-hung sash on the first floor and two sash on the second. The openings are regularly spaced similar to those of the front façade. They are defined by stone sills and segmentally arched openings formed by three rows of header brick. The rear facade of the 1909 block is fitted with a brick-clad, stairway addition at the west corner that was built in 1997. In addition there is a circa-1920s, one-story, metal-clad addition topped with a rounded roof. The 1997 stairway addition and the ca-1920s metal addition are not considered to be historically significant. **If demolition is proposed the Landmarks Commission will not object to the demolition.**

A cursory investigation of the interior, which has been converted into a modern restaurant facility, reveals that is devoid of historic integrity.²

²A formal investigation of the interior was not undertaken because there was no response to a letter requesting a site visit or the return of telephone messages. However, a cursory interior investigation did occur while as a patron of the restaurant.

City of Madison Landmarks Commission

LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria.

The Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company office building is associated with John A. Johnson, who was Madison's leading, late-nineteenth-century industrialist and is credited with turning the city into an important manufacturing center. Specifically, Johnson organized Madison's two largest turn-of-the-century manufacturing firms, one of which was the Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company. During Johnson's eighteen-year tenure as president at Fuller & Johnson, the company grew to be the largest industry in the city and was a national leader in employee benefits. At present, the subject structure is the only remaining, intact building of the once massive Fuller & Johnson complex and is also the only building of note with ties to John A. Johnson.

History

The Wisconsin Territorial Legislature in 1836 selected the recently platted town site of Madison as the location of the new state capital. Despite its selection, the settlement grew slowly until entrepreneur Leonard Farwell and the arrival of the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad sparked significant commercial and residential development. Other railroads soon followed and the village became a rail hub. The settlement incorporated in 1856 as the City of Madison. Throughout the nineteenth century, Madison remained a quiet city that relied on local farmers, state government offices and the University of Wisconsin to fuel the local economy. However, by the turn of the century, the city began to experience industrial growth due primarily to the efforts of industrialist John A. Johnson. The new factories were limited to a previously undeveloped district adjacent to East Washington Avenue and a number of railroad facilities. Generally, these factories used highly skilled artisans to produce farm-related equipment.³

The largest of these early industries was the Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company, which traces its roots back to 1840 when Charles Billings began to make plows in his small blacksmith shop at the corner of Main and Webster streets. In 1854, Billings constructed a small plow factory on King Street and, soon thereafter, created a partnership with Frank Firman known as Firman & Billings. At the time, it was one of the first farm implement manufacturers in the City of Madison. In 1880, the company was purchased by Morris E. Fuller and John A. Johnson, who incorporated it as the Madison Plow Company. The firm operated out of a factory located at the corner of Blair and Williamson streets although it soon moved to a large facility located at the corner of E. Washington Avenue and N. Dickinson Street. In 1882, the business was reorganized

³David Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1982), 49, 124-27, 178, 180-83, 195, 264-68; Katherine H. Rankin and Elizabeth Miller, *The Historic Resources of Downtown Madison*, Prepared for the City of Madison (1998), 38.

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as the Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company with Johnson serving as president.⁴

While both Fuller and Johnson were equal partners in the enterprise, Johnson was most responsible for the general direction of the company. Born in Norway in 1832, John A. Johnson and his family emigrated to Wisconsin in 1844. Ten years later, Johnson purchased a farm in Dane County's Town of Pleasant Prairie and soon served in a variety of township government positions. In 1857, he was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly and, in 1860, was elected the Dane County Clerk -- a position that required him to move to Madison. In 1869, Johnson left his post as clerk and joined the firm of Fuller & Williams as a salesman of agricultural implements. Fluent in three languages (Norwegian, English and German), Johnson excelled as a salesman in the upper Midwest, which was largely farmed by German and Scandinavian immigrants. In 1873, he became a full partner in the company and subsequently, the firm's name changed to Fuller & Johnson. Just prior, however, the energetic Johnson was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate in 1872, where he concentrated on the issues of railroad regulation and women's rights. After serving one term as senator, Johnson gave up politics to focus on business.⁵

Under Johnson's direction, Fuller & Johnson experienced tremendous growth. The Great Plains was rapidly filling with settlers who required farm implements and Johnson was quick to take advantage of the opportunity. Soon after becoming president, Johnson placed branch distribution houses in Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and North and South Dakota. These well-placed distribution centers allowed for a large network of implement dealers to carry Fuller & Johnson projects. Although the company made a full line of implements including cultivators, harrows and mowers, its signature product was the "Bonanza Prairie Breaker" plow which had a high reputation of being able to cut tough, virgin prairie. By 1885, the company offices were located in a new brick building (central portion of subject structure) and a local newspaper credited the company as being "the largest and most conspicuously commercial enterprise of the city and the one that will compare favorably with any in the West."⁶

⁴Edgar A. Brown, "Fuller-Johnson Firm Pioneer and Leader in Engine Industry," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), 27 February 1927; Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 125-26, 183-84.

⁵Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 183-91. Other activities pursued by John A. Johnson included being part-owner between 1872 and 1876 of the largest Scandinavian newspaper in the United States -- *Scandinaven*; establishing the Madison-based Hekla Fire Insurance Company in 1871; helping found the Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church, which later became the Bethel Lutheran Church (which is today the second-largest Lutheran denomination in the United States). As a state senator, Johnson attempted but failed to pass a railroad regulation bill; however, his bill became a model for successful regulation in other states and finally in Wisconsin in 1904. Other legislation initiated by Johnson included a bill that allowed married women to own property and conduct business, which was passed. See Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 187-88.

⁶Newspaper quote in Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 184; *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), 31 December 1885.

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Growth of the company continued for several reasons. First, the company's equipment had a reputation for easy maintenance and tough design. The firm was constantly improving its product line and it held thirty-two patents by 1899. Secondly, as a former salesman, Johnson understood that a proper sales and distribution network was a key to growth. By 1897, over 2,000 implement dealers throughout the United States sold Fuller & Johnson products. And finally, Johnson effectively utilized the art of advertising by personally creating eye-catching advertisements that were published in Midwestern newspapers, Scandinavian language publications and the leading trade journals of the day. These advertisements increased awareness of Fuller & Johnson equipment and assisted the firm in winning two awards at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. By 1899, the firm had expanded to sell implements in Europe, Australia and South America.⁷

As president, Johnson was an advocate for worker's rights and saw his employees as an integral part of the business by actively seeking suggestions for product improvement. Also, the factory was equipped with a library, lunch room and locker room, amenities that were considered to be very advanced for the period. More importantly, Fuller & Johnson was the only employer in Madison to provide economical rental housing for employees and is thought to have been the third company in the nation to offer a profit-sharing plan with factory supervisors. The company's efforts were rewarded in that the workforce never unionized or held a strike during Johnson's tenure as president.⁸

During his eighteen-year tenure, the elder Johnson transformed Fuller & Johnson from a small, nondescript business into Madison's first significant industry. With over 400 workers, annual sales over \$1 million and a 200,000 square foot factory, the Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company had successfully led the transformation of Madison from a local service center into a respectable industrial city that had the highest per capita wages of any city in Wisconsin in the early twentieth century.⁹

Shortly after John's death in 1901, his son Carl was elected as company president. The younger Johnson started to move Fuller & Johnson's emphasis on farm implements to internal combustion engines outfitted for farm use. The company designed a variety of these one-, two-, four- and eight-cylinder engines that were relatively lightweight when compared to steam engines. More importantly, these engines were cooled with oil rather than water so they could be used in the winter, which was vital in the upper Midwest. The most significant of these engines

⁷Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 184; Verne W. Kindschi, *The Fuller & Johnson Story: A Brief History of the Fuller & Johnson Manufacturing Company* (Madison, WI: American Printing Company, n.d.), 7.

⁸Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 188.

⁹*Ibid.*, 185, 190-91.

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was the farm pump engine, which was patented in 1908. The farm pump engine essentially replaced the windmill as the primary means of pumping water on the farm. Due to its distribution network, the firm was able to market its engines effectively and the sales grew to the point that Fuller & Johnson sold its farm implement line in 1911 and concentrated solely on engine manufacturing.¹⁰

In 1925, the Johnson family divested itself from the Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company so it could concentrate on the family's other business -- the Gisholt Machine Company.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, electrification and the development of small, inexpensive tractors began to eat at Fuller & Johnson's sales. In the late 1920s, the company underwent an expensive retooling to allow them to manufacture heavy-duty engines for the construction industry; however, few of these were sold due to the advent of the Great Depression. The company went out of business in 1933, although a small successor firm located in one of the firm's former storage buildings sold left-over parts until 1954.¹²

All of the buildings of the Fuller & Johnson complex were sold off after the firm went out of business. Between 1933 and 1939, the subject office building was used by the Wisconsin Transient Bureau as a shelter. In 1940, the Credit Union National Association, Inc. used the structure for its Madison-based operations, staying until 1950. For the next twenty years, Ohio Medical owned the building and used it as office space and as a warehouse. In 1970, the facility was converted for restaurant use and has had several tenants. The current occupant is Fyfe's Corner Bistro, which opened in 1993.¹³

Architecture

While two blocks are essentially vernacular, the southwest wing exhibits modest elements of the Neoclassical style. According to *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, the Neoclassical style was popular in Wisconsin between 1895 and 1935. Its most common attributes are symmetry in fenestration, classical detailing and ornate pediments located over entrances. While

¹⁰Kindschi, *The Fuller & Johnson Story*, 7-8, 74-75, 81-82.

¹¹The Gisholt Machine Company was founded by John A. Johnson in 1889 and manufactured machine tools. It eventually replaced Fuller & Johnson as Madison's largest employer and operated until 1972. Most of its factory complex, which is located at 1245-1301 E. Washington was built between 1901 and 1946. See Kindschi, *The Fuller & Johnson Story*, 4,11; Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 185, 188.

¹²Kindschi, *The Fuller & Johnson Story*, 8-9.

¹³*Ibid.*, 8-9; *Madison City Directory* (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Company, 1935, 1939, 1941; "Wisconsin's Internet Restaurant Guide--Fyfe's Corner Bistro," Material on-line available at www.foodspot.com/fyfes/coupon.html, Accessed 31 August 2001.

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the southwest wing does demonstrate these basic attributes of the style, the overall effect is limited and executed in a standard fashion. The building is not considered eligible for its architecture.¹⁴

Summary

The Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company Office Building is the last, intact structure of the once massive Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Company, which was the first significant industry to operate in Madison and served as the catalyst for the city's future industrial development. Additionally, John A. Johnson, the firm's founder and president for eighteen years, spearheaded industrial development in Madison and was a national leader in granting employee benefits.

Important Note

Although the parcel on which this building sits is nominated as a Madison Landmark in its entirety, the intent of the nomination is to protect only the 1885, 1892 and 1909 sections of the building. The recently added stairway addition and the small metal clad addition, both located on the back of the building, are not of historic interest. A request for demolition of one or both of these structures will not require approval by the Landmarks Commission.

¹⁴Barbara Wyatt, ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, 3 vols. (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Historic Preservation Division, 1986), Vol. 2: Architecture, 2/18; Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 343-44.



1344 E. Washington Avenue
-originally Fuller and Johnson office building
currently Fyfe's Corner Bistro

Location: Fuller & Johnson Manufacturing Company, 1344 East Washington Avenue

