

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common
Bellevue Apartment Building

(2) Historic (if applicable)
same

II. Location

(1) Street Address
29 E. Wilson St.

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)

III. Classification

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

(2) Zoning District

(3) Present Use
Apartment House

IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s)

Thomas Link

(2) Street Address
86589 Baily Hill Rd.
Eugene, OR 97405

(3) Telephone Number

V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number
0709--242-0114-1

(2) Legal Description
Original Plat. NE 1/2 Lot 4, All Lot 5,
Ex. part used for RR.

VI. Condition of Property

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

(2) Altered or Unaltered?
Altered

(3) Moved or Original Site?
Original site

(4) Wall Construction
Brick

(5) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the present and original physical construction and appearance (limit 500 words).

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

VI.(5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:

The Bellevue Apartment Building is a four story plus basement structure that sits on a medium sized lot in the heart of downtown Madison. There is only a minimal setback of the building along East Wilson Street, a one-way thoroughfare on the south edge of the downtown. The Bellevue sits in a highly dense neighborhood of large and medium-sized buildings associated with Madison's main downtown activities: state and local government offices, the state Capitol, private offices, and commercial buildings. There are some other residential buildings in the vicinity of the Bellevue, although not immediately adjacent to it. The Bellevue is surrounded on the north, east, and west sides with the above-mentioned buildings, but to the south is a steep drop-off beginning right at the rear of the building. The drop-off ends at a street which is the main bypass around Madison's capitol square, and on the south side of this street is a small, narrow park adjacent to Lake Monona.

The Bellevue is totally constructed of red brick, including the raised basement. It has a rectangular shape with numerous bay projections. These large bays include rectangular bays extending from first floor to the roof on the building's side facades, and two shallow bays that extend from first to fourth floors on the front facade. Decoration on the building includes large red brick chimneys that project from the roofline; a small stepped parapet on the front facade; a substantial pressed metal cornice encircling the building at the roofline; a concrete cornice separating the first and second stories of the front facade; a concrete water table; a concrete frontispiece on the main entrance; and some subtle brick corbelling throughout the building. Windows are all original, although they have been covered with aluminum combination storm-screen sashes. The original windows are double-hung sashes of various sizes. The upper panes of the windows consist of twelve lights. Some windows are grouped, particularly those which make up the square bays on the side facades. Windows have concrete sills and there are a few concrete tabs decorating front facade windows. The concrete frontispiece on the front entrance covers a recessed entry of double wood and glass doors topped with a transom. Above the cornice of the frontispiece is a concrete plate engraved "Bellevue" and the cornice is supported by two scroll brackets.

The interior of the Bellevue has seen few changes throughout its history. The basic apartment plan is repeated on all floors except for the basement and first floor. The basement contains equipment and service rooms. The first floor has four apartments on half of the floor and storage facilities on the other half of the floor. The upper floors have eight apartments on each floor. The hallways are wide and originally the four corner apartments were divided by double doors from the interior apartments. The corner apartments and the interior apartments are different from each other, but identical within each group. The corner apartments are larger and have a living room, dining room, kitchen, bath, bedroom, and dressing room. The interior apartments are identical except they do not have the dining room or the dressing room. All the apartments have 5'x10' porches which were originally screened sun porches. Windows have been added and they are now year-around small rooms. These porches are what make up the bay projections as seen on the building's side facades.

Bellevue Apartment Building

Landmark Nomination

VI. (5) Description (continued):

There is an abundance of woodwork throughout the apartment interiors, executed in the craftsman tradition. The woodwork includes wide moldings on doors and windows, cornice moldings, and picture rails. All apartments have identical fireplaces of plain brick construction. They are decorated with large wooden mantels which are simple and have the appearance of an exterior building cornice. The plain mantels give the fireplaces, in particular, a horizontal emphasis. Each apartment also has a built-in wooden cabinet with leaded glass doors. The lower doors of these cabinets opened up and originally a bed could be pulled out from this area. Most of the kitchens still have the original features including access to the service elevators which originally went to the kitchen in the basement. Kitchen space, though, is limited, reflecting the original design for a clientele thought to be taking most of their meals out or from the basement kitchen. Most of the bathrooms have had some remodeling, although there are some original features remaining in some and one can see that the original baths in the larger units were somewhat fancier than those in the smaller units. Except for some minor remodeling and the addition of some piping for an updated heating system, the apartments have changed little over the years. They have an elegant appearance that is not usually found in modern-day apartment houses, even luxury apartment houses.

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria:

The Bellevue Apartment Building should be designated a City of Madison Landmark because it is architecturally significant as the best example of Madison's early twentieth century apartment houses, a type of construction of which only a few buildings on the scale of the Bellevue were built during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Bellevue is also an example of a particular type of apartment house--the downtown residence for the growing middle and upper middle class white collar person. Local builder Charles E. Marks built the Bellevue and it is an important example of his career, being his only known apartment house project.

Architecture

During the 1910s a new type of housing sprang up in Madison's downtown. This type of housing--the apartment house--met several housing needs in the city. It provided a larger number of housing units on a small city lot than did a single-family residence or flats. Therefore, apartment houses increased the housing capacity of Madison at a time when the central city was well built up and new housing developments were in the suburbs, several miles from downtown. The apartment house also provided convenient housing for a growing population of white collar workers in Madison, many of whom worked for the state government located downtown. And, the apartment was a smaller alternative for the middle and upper middle classes, who may have found a single-family residence difficult to maintain, or too expensive to acquire. These persons, though, still wanted some services made available to them, and depending on the type of apartment house, they could get them in varying degrees.

From the beginning Charles E. Marks designed the Bellevue to fit the middle and upper middle class person who desired extra services. In the spring of 1913, when construction on the Bellevue got underway, Marks advertised the building for prospective tenants. The half-page advertisement emphasized the luxuries that would be available in the building. "Do you wish to live in ease and comfort?" the ad stated. It went on to say that the Bellevue was equipped with an electric passenger elevator, special service elevators to a large kitchen in the basement, a central vacuum system, a private phone system, soft hot water, special garbage disposal system, individual apartment heat controls, and finally, "relief from the servant problem" (due to all the services provided). The ad also stressed such features in each apartment as a screened porch, a large fireplace, built-in bookcase with leaded glass doors, a built-in dresser in the bedroom, a bed on rollers (so it could be put in the screened porch in summer), a gas stove, and a refrigeration system.¹

The Bellevue was completed in the spring of 1914. When it opened, it was noted in the newspaper as "the last word in convenience." The article pointed out the features previously mentioned in the advertisement and emphasized the "sun parlor", the moveable bed, abundant closets in the bedroom, and the large living and/or dining rooms. "The kitchenette," the article stated, "is perhaps the most unusual little room. It contains a china closet, an ice box, cubboards, and a large gas range. . . . The ice box is cooled by an ammonia brine plant in the basement which circulates brine to all the apartments. In the icebox is a receptacle

Bellevue Apartment Building

Landmark Nomination

VII. (7) Significance (continued):

which delivers ice cold drinking water at the front of the ice box." Also lauded were the apartments' hot soft water, central vacuum system, garbage removal system, and the two laundries in the basement.²

Because the Bellevue was the largest of the early apartment houses built in Madison, it was the most expensive. However, proportionately, its "luxuries" made it much more expensive than similarly sized buildings. The Baskerville Apartments, 28 units (as opposed to 32 in the Bellevue), was built in 1913 with an estimated cost of \$50,000. The Bellevue had an estimated cost of \$90,000. A moderate sized apartment building, the Pinckney Apartments, 15 units, was estimated to cost only \$10,000. After construction, the Bellevue attracted the clientele that marks had intended. During the first few years of the building's existence, the tenants were all middle or upper middle class white collar workers. Occupations included salespeople, businesspersons (such as executive of the Madison Gas and Electric Company), state government professionals (such as the president of the Board of Control), and university personnel (such as the dean of the university extension).³

The Bellevue is significant for architecture primarily because it is the largest and most intact of all the earliest apartment houses constructed in Madison during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This group of apartment houses brought a new and ultimately popular type of housing to the isthmus, making it possible for more people to live on already built up land. The pervasiveness of apartment buildings today make the early appearance of this type of housing significant and the best example of this type of housing most significant. In 1919 the first group listing of apartment houses appeared in the city directories and in this year there were 29 apartment houses listed. By checking individual listings for each building, estimated construction dates were determined. No apartment building listed in the 1919 directory appeared before 1909, and most appeared between 1914 and 1917. These years, then, were the boom years of apartment house construction during the early years of this type of housing first appearing in Madison. The Bellevue's construction date of 1913-14 makes it part of the boom era.

The assertion that the Bellevue is the best example of early apartment houses in Madison is arrived at from a comparison of downtown apartment houses of a moderate to large size to the Bellevue. Most of these apartment houses are still extant and include the Baskerville apartments (121-29 S. Hamilton), 28 units; the Stratford (433 W. Gilman), 18 units; the Pinckney apartments (204 N. Pinckney), 15 units; the Cass (202 N. Pinckney), 14 units; the Hamilton (222 N. Hamilton), 12 units; and the Eleanor (405 N. Frances), 13 units. Except for the Mediterranean revival style Pinckney Apartments, all these examples have plain brick construction and few architectural details. In fact, there is a similarity of design to all the apartment houses of the era, including the Bellevue. They are all plain buildings and architectural emphasis is on the type of buildings rather than a particular style. Of these examples, though, the Bellevue stands out. It is the most impressive because of its size, its quality of construction, its more interesting facade, and its level of integrity. It is also the most impressive building in relationship to its site. Because the Bellevue is the best example of the pioneering group of a new and important type of residential construction in Madison, it should be recognized as an important architectural landmark in the community.

Bellevue Apartment Building

Landmark Nomination

VII. (7) Significance (continued):

The Bellevue is also significant for architecture because of its outstanding interior design and its unusual features. The craftsman details, utilizing a large amount of woodwork is impressive. But it is the sleekness of the design of the woodwork that makes it distinctive. The way in which the woodwork is applied gives the apartments a horizontal feeling and a more modern look. The built-in conveniences, most of which are still in evidence in the apartments, are important artifacts indicating how a builder provided services for a specific clientele. The large, spacious rooms and the sunporches gave the individual apartments, even the smaller units, a sense of elegance and space. The high degree of integrity compliments the exterior integrity, and adds to the building's overall significance.

Of less importance, but interesting to the history of architects and builders in Madison, the Bellevue is the work of local builder Charles E. Marks. Marks worked in Madison alone between 1911 and 1916. He was also associated with his brother, Eugene H. Marks, another builder. The buildings which have been identified as the work of Charles or E. H. Marks are all fine and well-constructed small residences in the Prairie style of Craftsman tradition. The Bellevue is the largest project associated with either Marks, and its craftsman interior design indicates that their exterior design principles could extend to their interiors. The Bellevue is an important work in the career of Charles Marks in Madison. It is his only known large-scale project, and as a pioneering type of structure in the city, it identifies Marks as an innovator as a builder in the city.

The apartment house is one of the most numerous forms of housing in the late twentieth century in any larger community. The earliest apartment houses in Madison are special because they began the trend toward this type of housing in the city. The Bellevue, because it is the best example of the early apartment house in Madison, and because it was an unusual type of apartment house, built for an upper-class clientele, is a significant Madison landmark and should be designated as such.

Notes

1. Advertisement for the Bellevue Apartments, Wisconsin State Journal, May 8, 1913, p. 10.
2. "Cozy Corner in One of Furnished Bellevue Apartments," Wisconsin State Journal, April 20, 1914, p. 6.
3. "Three Million Is Being Spent for Buildings Here," Wisconsin State Journal, May 21, 1913, p. 12; Madison City Directories for 1914 and 1916.

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

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner Charles E. Marks	(2) Original Use Apartment Building
(3) Architect or Builder Charles E. Marks, builder	(4) Architectural Style
(5) Date of Construction 1913-1914 (Tax Rolls/Abstract/Newspaper)	(6) Indigenous Materials Used
(7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words.	

VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used

1. Bellevue Apartments advertisement, Wisconsin State Journal, May 8, 1913, p. 10.
2. "Cozy Corner in One of Furnished Bellevue Apartments," Wisconsin State Journal, April 20, 1914, p. 6.
3. Madison City Directories, 1900-1919.
4. Mollenhoff, David. Madison A History of the Formative Years. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1982, pp. 352-357, footnote 278, Chapter 6.
5. "Three Million Is Being Spent for Buildings Here," Wisconsin State Journal, May 21, 1913, p. 10.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

IX. Form Prepared By: Carol Lohry Cartwright

(1) Name and Title Consultant, prepared for the owner

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

(3) Address
 R.2, 5581A Hackett Rd.
 Whitewater, WI 53190

(4) Telephone Number
 (414) 473-6820

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared
 October 1, 1986