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December 7, 1987

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common "Mills Folly"	(2) Historic (if applicable) Simeon and Maria Mills House
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II. Location

(1) Street Address 2709 Sommers Avenue	(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk) 16th Aldermanic District
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III. Classification

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

(2) Zoning District R4	(3) Present Use Eight Unit Residence
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IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s)
Robert J. Hugo

(2) Street Address 2706 Warner Street Madison, WI 53713	(3) Telephone Number 274-0826
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V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number 0710-053-3503-1	(2) Legal Description Parcel B of Certified Survey Map #278 recorded in Dane Co. Reg. of Deeds Vol. 2, Pg. 1
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VI. Condition of Property

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

(2) Altered or Unaltered? Altered	(3) Moved or Original Site? Original Site
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(4) Wall Construction
Sandstone

(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:

Sitting conspicuously on the south side of Sommers Avenue is 2709 Sommers, a massive sandstone structure built in the Italianate style in 1863.

The irregularly shaped (see drawing), two-story house takes up portions of four city lots and sits approximately seventy-five feet from Sommers Avenue on a spacious, well-groomed lawn. Constructed of brown sandstone laid in random ashlar bond, the house's setting and mass offer a striking appearance that is further accentuated by a low pitched gable roof. The building is set on a rock-faced stone foundation. The first floor windows are tall four-over-four double hung sash windows and the second story has four-over-four arched windows. All of the windows (except for the arched windows on the lower center section of the house) have rather elaborate stone enframements. Besides the sheer massing of the house, the most striking features immediately noticeable are the five large boxed cornices with partial overscale cornice returns. Double brackets are found on the frieze board below the cornice returns and on each corner of the house. The wide frieze board extends along the entire perimeter of the house. The roof itself is covered in asphalt shingles. An unusual feature is four, hooded wall dormers found on the middle section of the house over the arched windows on the east and west sides of the house. The main entry to the house is located in the front-facing ell of the main block, while secondary entrances are located on the side and rear elevations.

The interior of the house has been altered to accommodate eight separate apartments and it is likely that the original floor plan has been altered considerably. The interior's high ceilings, floor materials and small amounts of original trim are still visible in places.

The house appears to have retained a great deal of its historic exterior integrity. The front elevation does, however, show signs of a large open porch which at one time likely covered the main front entrance. Presently there is only a concrete stoop at the front entrance. Fire escapes have also been added to the side and rear elevation.

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

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner

Simeon and Maria Mills

(2) Original Use

Single Family Residence

(3) Architect or Builder

Unknown

(4) Architectural Style

Italianate

(5) Date of Construction

1863

(6) Indigenous Materials Used

Sandstone

(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. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) Name and Title

Katherine Rankin, Preservation Planner and William Wright, Historian

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

City of Madison and State Historical Society of Wisconsin

(3) Address

Department of Planning & Development
215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

(4) Telephone Number

266-6552

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

September 23, 1987

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

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

2709 Sommers Avenue, historically known as "Elmside" or "Mills Folly", derives its significance from its association with Simeon Mills, one of Madison's earliest settlers and most prominent citizens in the 19th century. Mills' varied roles as local justice, County Commissioner, State Senator, village trustee, real estate speculator, banker and railroad developer placed him in a position of sizable influence over the development and direction of the young community of Madison and the south-central region of the state. The Mills House is also a outstanding example of a Victorian Italianate residence constructed of local sandstone.

Association with Simeon Mills

Simeon Mills (1810-1895) was one of Madison's most outstanding citizens in the 19th century. Born in Norfolk, Connecticut and raised in Ashtabula, Ohio, Mills made his way to the Wisconsin territory in 1835 and spent time in the village of Mineral Point and was present at the establishment of the Wisconsin territorial government in Belmont.¹ Mills traveled to the site which was to be the new territorial capitol (Madison) and there he decided to settle. He built a log cabin and opened a small grocery store in 1837, thus making him one of the very first settlers in Madison and one of its very first commercial entrepreneurs.

Mills rapidly made a prominent reputation for himself in the fledgling village by becoming the first mail carrier between Madison and Milwaukee in 1837. He made the run twice weekly until 1842 and it is noted that he never failed in making the trip.² His civic activities included serving as the district's first Justice of the Peace in 1839, as one of Dane County's first three commissioners and as Dane County's first senator upon the achievement of Wisconsin statehood in 1848. As senator, Mills introduced the bill that enacted into law the founding and chartering of the University of Wisconsin and he played an active part in its growth throughout the 19th century. In 1861 Governor Randall charged Mills with the recruitment of volunteers for the Union Army in Wisconsin which he did with great success and Randall also appointed him as State Paymaster General, a post he held from 1861-1865. Locally he served as village trustee and village treasurer in Madison through the 1850's, and was on Madison's first Board of Education starting in 1856. He was also a member on the Board of Trustees for the State Hospital for the Insane (1860-1877) and one of the University's first regents. Mills was also active in the development of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Simeon Mills is a name synonymous with Madison's developing business community. Realizing the future potential of the Madison area, Mills became involved in real estate speculation early on and was able to amass a modest fortune in his lifetime and direct much of the early development of the village. He was the first president of the Bank of Madison and also the first president of the Madison Mutual Insurance Company. Mills also served on the

board of the Madison Gas, Light & Coke Co.³ In 1844 he was a partner in Madison's first newspaper, the Argus. Mills was greatly involved in the developing railroad industry in southeastern Wisconsin. He was not only president of the Madison and Portage Railroad (1862) but also was director of the Beloit and Madison line. Both lines were essential to the early development of Madison as an important regional trade center and secured for the city a assured role as a business, industrial and financial center in the south-central region of the state.⁴

Simeon Mills was one of Madison's most prominent, active, and trusted citizens in the 19th century. He was able to contribute to the growth of a village, in which he was one of its first citizens and important entrepreneurs, into one of Wisconsin's most important cities. His civic and business activities were a tremendous asset to the establishment of the city of Madison. Along with other early influential citizens, Mills must assuredly be recognized as having had great input in steering the early course of city development.

2709 Sommers Street is the last remaining residence of four that Simeon Mills owned in his lifetime. He originally planned to build his main residence on this then country estate which now lies in the urban area of east Madison. Built in 1863, the house that Mills referred to as "Elmside" became locally known as "Mill's Folly" for being located so distant from the center of the small community and in 1867, Mills began construction of another house at the corner of Monona Avenue and West Doty Street (where the City-County Building is presently located). The Mills family resided in Elmside for five years before selling it. The Mills family also owned a city residence at the same time as Elmside at the corner of Main and Monona Avenue (now demolished).

Later owners and occupants of the house included J.W. Hudson who was a prominent industrialist and real estate promoter in Madison, and Sam Miller, a nationally known opera and theater promoter.

Architecture

The Simeon Mills House is an excellent example of Italianate architecture as described in Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan vol. 2. The Italianate style is evidenced by irregular proportions that are topped with wide eaves and a graceful low pitched gable roof. The use of brackets and overscaled cornice returns further accentuates the Italianate motif.

The Italianate style of the Simeon Mills House is reflective of the period of rapid growth in Madison in the mid-19th century. This style was popular with the wealthier businessmen and civic leaders in the city and was prevalent at mid-century. Several outstanding Italianate style houses are extant in Madison including the Old Executive Mansion (NRHP-4-11-73) and the James B. Bowen House (NRHP 3-1-82). The Langdon Street Historic District (NRHP 6-26-86) contains several examples of houses in the Italianate style. The Mills residence is also worthy of note as a fine example of local stone construction. The locally available sandstone utilized in the Mills House was quite popular as a building material for use in commercial blocks, churches and affluent residential designs during Madison's early boom years in the

1850s and 60s. The Mills House is representative of the best in that well executed masonry construction tradition in the community.

¹History of Dane County, Biographical and Genealogical. Western Historical Association, Madison, Wisconsin, 1906, p. 125

²"Magazine of Western History," vol. 6, No. 1, May 1887. Williams Publishing Co. Cleveland, Ohio, p. 18

³Capital Times: Madison, Feb. 8, 1967. "For 58 Years Mills had a Finger in All the Pies of Pioneer Madison."

⁴Mollenhoff, David V. Madison, A History of the Formative Years. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, Iowa, 1982, p. 104