

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

Name of Building or Site

Common Name: Tierney / Lusson House
Historic Name: Robert White House

Location

Street Address: 633 E. Gorham Street
Aldermanic District: District 2

Classification

Type of Property: Building
Zoning District: R5
Present Use: Residential



Figure 1

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

Name(s): Joseph Lusson
Street Address: 627 E. Gorham Street, Madison, WI 53703

Legal Description (available at City Assessor's Office)

Parcel Number: 070913311050
Legal Description: Original Plat, Blk 119, NE 60 Ft of Lot 6.

Condition of Property

Physical Condition: Good to Excellent
Altered/Unaltered: Some Alterations
Moved or Original Site: Original Site
Wall Construction: Wood Frame

Historical Data

Original Owner: Robert White
Original Use: Residential
Architect or Builder: Unknown
Architectural Style: Vernacular Cube, or Pyramidal, Form with Italianate style features
Date of Construction: 1856
Indigenous Materials Used: Unknown

List of Bibliographical References Used

City and State Archives:

Cultural Resource Management Plan. Historic Preservation Division of the State Historic Preservation Office, Wisconsin Historical Society.
Rankin, K and T. Heggland. *Madison Intensive Survey Report, 2 Volumes.* For the City of Madison and the Historic Preservation Division of the State Historic Preservation Office, Wisconsin Historical Society, 1994.
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: 1885, 1892, 1898, 1902, 1908, 1942.
Survey Form. City of Madison Intensive Survey. City Planning Department Historic Preservation files.

Periodicals, pamphlets, and websites:

www.cityofmadison.com/assessor/property/index.cfm
www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi/detailrecord.asp Wisconsin Architecture & History Inventory.

Books:

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *Victorian Cottage Residences.* New York, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1981. Published New York, NY: John Wiley and Son, 1873 edition, first edition published 1842.
Harris, Cyril M. *American Architecture an Illustrated Encyclopedia.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.
Levitan, Stewart D. *Madison: The Illustrated Sesquicentennial History, Vol 1 1856-1931.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses.* New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
Mollenhoff, David V. *Madison: A History of the Formative Years. 2nd Ed.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, 2003.
Williams, Zane. *Double Take: A Rephotographic Survey of Madison, Wisconsin.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

Other:

Baas, Alexius. "All Around the Town". Capital Times, 04/13/1951.
National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. "Fourth Lake Ridge Historic District." National Park Service, 1996.
Personal Communication: Joe Lusson, April 2012.

Form Prepared By

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Date Form Was Prepared: April 2012

Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance

The Robert White House, at 633 E. Gorham Street, is a two-story vernacular Pyramidal -or Cube- form building exhibiting Italianate style ornament, constructed in 1856. The house is in good to excellent condition with high integrity of vernacular form and medium integrity of the Italianate style.

The Vernacular Form



Figure 2

When describing vernacular architecture, types are defined by their footprint and massing more so than ornamental stylistic details. This house is a vernacular Pyramidal type (also known as a Cube type), a wood-frame two-story house with a footprint that is roughly square, a low-pitched hipped roof and a full width open front porch. The house features decorative elements of the Italianate style and currently is clad with aluminum siding. (Figure 2)

The Italianate Style

The Italianate style was prevalent in the Midwest between 1850 and 1880 and is characterized by having two or more stories; a low-pitched, hipped roof with widely overhanging eaves and having paired ornamental brackets; tall windows which were often arched or featured window hoods; a square cupola; and an arched door or door surround also often having a transom or sidelights. This house is of the simple hipped roof variant – the most common subtype of Italianate style houses – which are square or rectangular box-shaped houses with hipped roofs, (those with a central cupola also called cupola houses), and are three bays wide.

Exterior Description

The house is located on E. Gorham Street which is oriented in a northeast-southwest direction; the street is adjacent to and parallel with the southeast shore of Lake Mendota. The house is located on the

southeast side of the street and faces northwest: James Madison Park and the lake are across the street. The massing of the house is three bays wide.

The foundation is of sandstone; at the front of the house the foundation is not visible due to the location of the porch and the side facades and a portion of the rear façade have been parged with a cementitious coating. The foundation material is visible at the portion of the rear façade that has not been parged. The foundation is slightly raised at the front of the house and as the grade drops toward the rear of the lot, the foundation wall is increasingly visible above grade until at the back of the house it is almost completely visible above grade. The house is of wood frame construction with wood clapboard siding which is extant but has been covered with aluminum siding. The moderately projecting eaves are of wood. The roof form is hipped with a low pitch; at the peak, the roof is flat. The roofing material is asphalt shingles. The house has a pair of interior brick chimneys, located on the exterior wall of the SW side facade.

The house form is vernacular, however as was common at the time, it was embellished with Italianate style ornament. The front entrance is located at the NE side of the front façade and is a significant character defining feature having retained the original door surround with transom and sidelights. Each sidelight is tall and narrow, comprised of five lights of glass divided by horizontal muntins. Between the lights and the threshold is a rectangular, wood, recessed panel. The narrow transom spans the space directly above the door and has three lights divided by vertical muntins. The transom also has dentils below the lights. (Figure 3)

The door surround and the threshold are of wood. The transom, sidelights and door are slightly recessed within the larger frame of which has a simple squared profile. The front door is wood with six recessed panels. There is an open, full-width porch, one story in height. The deck is of wood and one step up from grade. There are four simple, squared, wood columns at the front of the porch supporting an unadorned entablature and shed roof. The porch ceiling is beaded board and there is a non-original pendant light fixture in front of the door.



Figure 3



Figure 4

The house retains original, tall, 1-over-1 wood double-hung windows. One-over-one sash is a typical window configuration of the Italianate style. Adjacent to the door at the front facade are two windows; three windows are evenly spaced at the second floor. All of the windows have wood surrounds with squared-edge profiles. The first floor windows have surrounds that extend to the floor of the porch and feature a wood recessed panel under each window. (Figure 4) Wood shutters with cutouts in celestial shapes are fixed to the exterior wall; shutters previously were positioned and affixed to be operational. Some of the shutter hardware is extant on the house.

This house exhibits 1-over-1, 2-over-2, and 2-over-1 sash configurations. Because these are historic window configurations, it is unknown which of these windows may not be original (if any) without further investigation and possibly testing as well. At the NE side of the house, there is a single window at each of the basement, first and second floor levels. The basement window is a contemporary replacement one-over-one. The first floor has an historic, wood, two-over-two double hung window. The second floor window is wood, one-over-one double-hung. At the SW side of the house, there are three windows at the basement level, two windows at the first floor and two stacked above at the second floor. These windows are wood, with 1-over-1 sash. And finally, at the rear (SE) of the house, the basement has replacement 1-over-1 windows; the first floor has wood 2-over-2 windows; and at the second floor the windows are 1-over-1 wood sash.

At the rear façade, there are two doors: one is a non-original, contemporary door. The second door is wood with two vertical rows of five divided lights.

Other Italianate style ornament

The paired wood modillions under the eaves are an important character defining feature of the Italianate style, particularly when applied to these vernacular forms. As is often the case with vernacular forms of an architectural style, there is not a plethora of other stylistic ornament; therefore, retaining those original elements which define the style is critical to the integrity and identification of the building. These horizontal brackets do not support the eaves but are ornamental. (Figure 5)



Figure 5

Rear Changes

A few changes have occurred at the rear of the house over time. As early as 1898, Sanborn Maps show a one-story rear addition and by 1942, Sanborn Maps show this one-story area to be used as a garage. This addition is no longer extant and it is unknown when the garage addition was removed. Currently, there is a partial width rear deck off of the first floor level. The deck is accessed from the interior through first floor doors and does not have a stair to grade. The deck is of wood, and supported by posts. These alterations have occurred at the rear of the house and as such do not detract from the building's integrity.

Other Alterations

The house is currently clad with aluminum siding, installed sometime after 1985. A home inspection conducted in 2003 notes that the wood siding was removed as reported by the owner of the house at the time. An investigation of conditions has confirmed that the wood siding is in fact extant beneath the existing aluminum siding. An historic photograph shows that the top of the roof was embellished with cresting.

Integrity

Evaluating these changes for a determination of integrity is more nuanced than simply declaring the house to be of high or medium integrity. Although the changes described above affect the integrity of the house as a specimen of the Italianate style -bringing it to the level of medium integrity- there remain character defining features which still clearly identify the house as Italianate. The changes do not eliminate the ability to recognize the Italianate character of the house. This point is significant because the ability to recognize features of a houses' historic style is used as an evaluation threshold for determining if a house has lost too much of its historic character to be recognized as historic.

As far as the vernacular character of the house, these changes have no affect on the integrity of the house as an example of a vernacular cube or pyramidal form from the mid-1850s.

Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria

Summary

The Robert White House is being nominated as a City of Madison Landmark under criteria 1 and 3 of section 33.19(4) of the City of Madison Code of Ordinances. Under Criterion 1, the building reflects the broad cultural and social history of the community. The house is a very good, intact example of housing which reflects residential settlement patterns as neighborhoods expanded away from the Capitol Square and the earliest developed neighborhoods of Madison. Further, it exemplifies housing types of the middle class in Madison in 1856 and the years immediately preceding and following. Under Criterion 3, the building embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type, inherently valuable for the study of vernacular forms of residential architecture in Madison during the middle of the 19th century.

Criterion 1: Cultural and Social History

Historic Context

The entire developmental history of the city of Madison, the subject of books, will not be described here; however, it is important to note milestones which influenced the growth of the neighborhood. Madison was incorporated as a village in 1846 and became a city in 1856. The following developmental evolution is summarized from David Mollenhoff's book, *Madison – A History of the Formative Years*.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, settlement in Madison was concentrated on the southeast side of Capitol Hill then spread to encompass all of Capitol Hill. Growth was generally limited by the distances that were reasonable for walking, primarily walking to work and which is why Madison's earliest residential neighborhoods were located around the Capitol. Between 1846 and 1856 Madison enjoyed a population boom which increased resident numbers from 600 to 9,000, a 1,500% increase. As the areas around Capitol Hill were already developed, people were forced to develop new residential areas, especially northeast and southwest of the Capitol.

A vast area of the isthmus between Lake Mendota (historically named Fourth Lake) and Lake Monona (historically named Third Lake) was low-lying and wet; uninviting for easy residential development. As a result, the preferred location for new residential settlement was on the higher ridgeline areas along the two lakes. Therefore by the mid-1870s, neighborhoods had developed along Third Lake Ridge and Fourth Lake Ridge.

The Robert White House was constructed during this earliest phase of residential development and therefore is a physical representative example of the geographic placement of housing from this era. The house is located approximately six blocks from the Capitol Square, the Square being the

historic commercial and civic center of the city. Additionally, the establishment of a school (1867, Second Ward School, in the 700 block of E. Gorham Street), the improvement of roads and later, transportation in the Fourth Lake Ridge neighborhood encouraged and supported the expansion of residential settlement in the neighborhood.

Robert White

The home was constructed by Robert White, a carpenter and builder who built the home for himself. In 1856, this was the first house constructed on the block. Little else is currently known about Robert; city directories indicate that he lived in the house until 1864. In 1864 White sold the house to Denison Worthington whose occupation was corporate secretary of the Madison Mutual Insurance Company. Worthington lived in the house until 1877 when he sold it to Marian Rodermund, widow of pioneer Madison brewer John Rodermund. Marian's daughter Cora eventually inherited the house. Cora married Dr. T.W. Evans and they lived in the home until 1919. Dr. Evans was a prominent Madison physician and surgeon. After Dr. Evans' death in 1919, the home was sold to Mr. and Mrs. L.W. Hutchcroft. Mr. Hutchcroft worked as a statistician with the State Board of Health. Mr. Hutchcroft's widow, Edna P. Hutchcroft remained in the house until it was sold in 1963. It is around this time that the home was converted to apartments. City Directory research supports this conclusion because after 1963, the name of the occupants changes almost yearly. In 2007 Matt Meier sold the home to the current owners.

While the house was owner occupied, those who resided there were of the middle class. The men held positions in business, medicine and science reflecting the demographic of the professional class and the socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhood. The Robert White house is representative of the homes and building traditions of the middle class in the mid-nineteenth century. These early homes reflect the position of their residents and are important for how they reveal the social and economic developmental history of the community.

This house then is significant for its contributions to the study of the broad cultural and social history of Madison, its middle class housing, and locations of middle class neighborhoods in 1856 – the year of Madison's incorporation as a city – and for the study of the vernacular forms chosen by middle class residents for the design of their homes.

Criterion 3: Architecture

The Robert White House embodies a vernacular form and a vernacular interpretation of the formal Italianate style. This house is a vernacular Pyramidal type (also known as a Cube type), a wood-frame two-story house with a footprint that is roughly square, having a low-pitched hipped roof and a full width open front porch across a façade that is three bays wide.ⁱ The Italianate style is characterized by having two or more stories; a low-pitched, hipped roof with widely overhanging eaves and having paired ornamental brackets; tall windows which were often arched or featured window hoods; a square cupola; and an arched door or door surround also often having a transom or sidelights. This house is of

the simple hipped roof variant – the most common subtype of Italianate style houses – which are square or rectangular box-shaped houses with hipped roofs, (if possessing a central cupola also called cube and cupola houses), and are three bays wide.

Data analysis was conducted to research both the vernacular Pyramidal/Cube form and the Italianate style using the “Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory” (AHI) database which is located at the State Historic Preservation Office of the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison and online. This database has survey data from all of the comprehensive surveys conducted in Madison. By searching the AHI, one is able to understand the degree to which various historic resources in Madison are extant.

Although the Pyramidal –or Cube - is a common vernacular form, due to its simplicity, houses of this form often are not identified as such but are identified by whichever formal architectural style ornament is applied. It’s as if the form is so simple it is overlooked as a vernacular building type independent of stylistic ornament. In this case, the house is not identified by its vernacular form but is identified in the database as an Italianate house and was inventoried as such in the City of Madison Intensive Survey, the data for which was then entered into the AHI. This is important to note because when buildings are studied for their architecture, it should not be overlooked that they often contribute to the history of architecture in the city on multiple levels, for example in this case, being representative of a particular vernacular form.

It is also important to note that in the database the form is identified only as the Cube form (not Pyramidal) and the Madison survey methodology did not recognize the two-story variant. This makes it impossible to conduct data analysis for the Pyramidal vernacular form using the survey data. Instead, the house was identified as an example of the Italianate style; therefore, the comparative data for the Italianate style was studied to understand the contextual framework for this house within the greater history of nineteenth century architecture in Madison.

Italianate Style (1840-1885)

The Italianate style was a popular house form in the rural Midwest in the mid- to late- nineteenth century. This house style was commonly constructed of wood due to the abundance of milled wood accessible to rural areas via the rapidly expanding railroad system and accessible in cities due to the close proximity of local mills although many fine examples can be found of stone and brick. The Italianate style was derived from the architecture of Italian villas and originated in England at the start of the Picturesque Movement. The Picturesque Movement developed as a reaction to the formal classical ideals in architecture that had been popular throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Stylistic influences were widely distributed through pattern books on architectural taste, popular at the time and commonly available across the country. Between 1820 and 1880 the “Romantic” styles articulated in pattern books dominated residential architecture and included the Greek Revival, Italianate, Gothic Revival, Octagon and the Exotic Revivals such as Swiss Chalet, Egyptian and Oriental styles. The movement in architectural taste toward a varied combination of romantic styles is attributed

to Andrew Jackson Downing. His books were the first of their kind, describing and illustrating tasteful and fashionable home designs. The success of his book *Cottage Residences*, published in 1842, established him as an authority on the subject of architectural style and influenced the tastes of the American public in regard to residential architecture. *Cottage Residences* encouraged the use of Italianate, Gothic Revival, and the other Exotic Revival styles as appropriate tasteful design for new construction. His books specialized in describing the small inexpensive detached house in the country (suburban) setting. The application of stylistic ornament to popular vernacular forms was the perfect marriage of practical construction and fashionable adornment.

The Italianate style with its wide overhanging bracketed eaves was typically found on two and three story buildings. Varying forms include a cube with low pitched hipped roof, rectangular plan with front gable roof, or asymmetrical plan with cross hip or cross gable roof. Often this style included a cupola. Stylistic details include the following. Tall windows are characteristic, commonly with sashes having one-over-one or two-over-two panes of glazing, arched or curved window tops as well as rectangular window tops, and hooded, bracketed or pedimented window crowns. Cornices featured large eave brackets, often paired, in a seemingly infinite variety of shapes. Porches, single-story in height, were either small entry porches or full-width and were universally employed at the front of the house. Porch ornament was relatively restrained and columns were often square posts with beveled corners. Doorways featured both single and paired doors, large-panes of glazing in the door, and surrounds mirroring the shapes around the windows. Transoms above the door were common and although sidelights were less common, were still often employed.

Study of the AHI database shows that of the 4,418 total houses surveyed, 71 are Italianate, 56 of which were constructed in 1900 or earlier, and 5 were constructed in 1856. This tells us that of all of the Italianate houses surveyed in Madison, only 5.63% are from 1856, one of the earliest periods of Madison's history, and Italianate houses from 1856 make up only 0.09% of all of the houses surveyed.

This number illustrates the fact that while generally the Italianate style and vernacular interpretations of the style were popular, they certainly are no longer common in Madison. Furthermore, the fact that Italianate houses from 1856 make up less than one tenth of 1% of all extant houses surveyed, means that this stylistic type and of this age has become quite rare. Vernacular forms are arguably our most vulnerable building types, often demolished because of the perception that they are ordinary or commonly found and the perception that they are insignificant as architectural specimens and therefore dismissed as not something to be retained or valued. The Robert White House is an increasingly rare example of both a vernacular form and of the Italianate style of architecture in Madison and is valuable for the study of a period and architectural type in Madison.

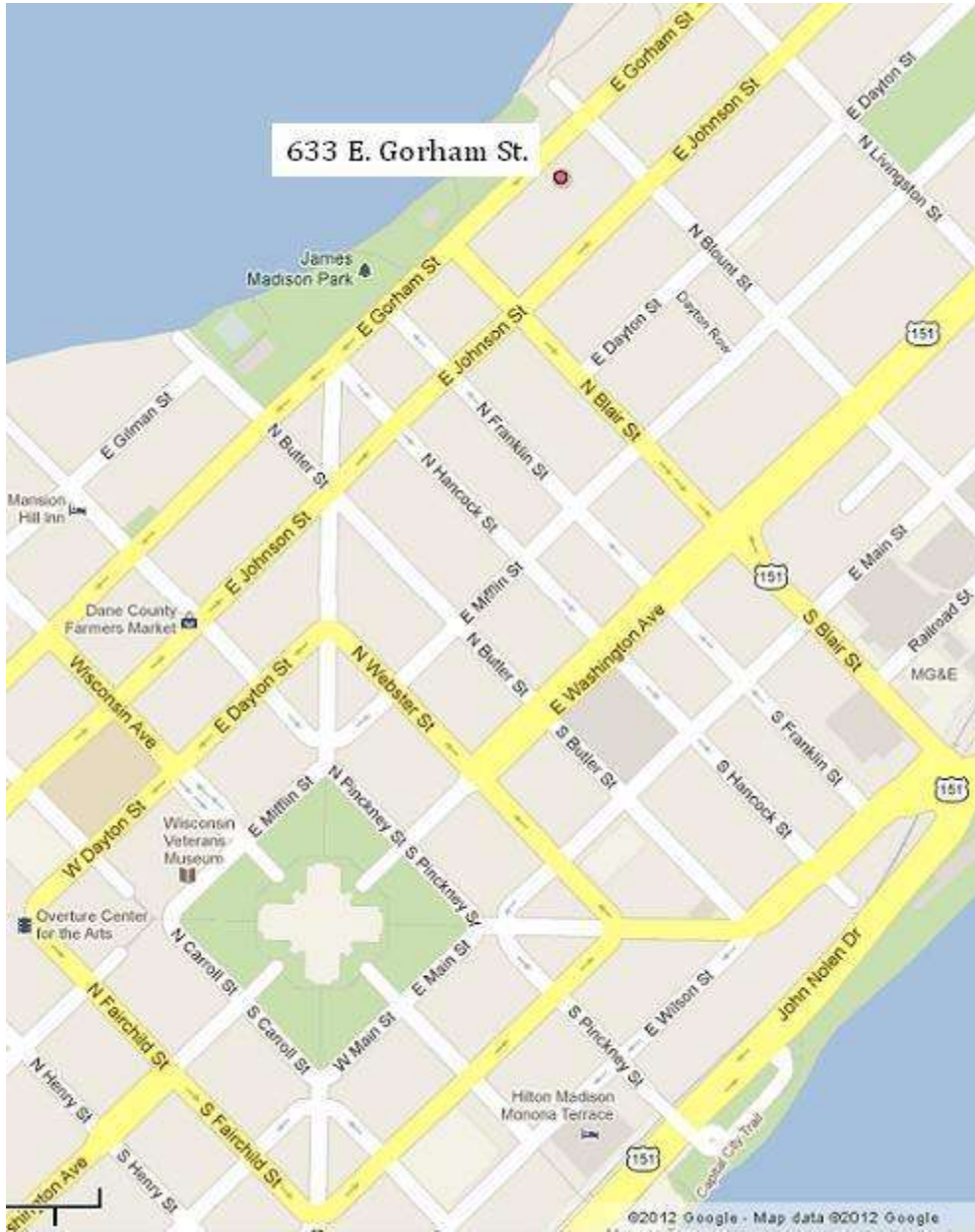
The Robert White House is a vernacular interpretation of the Italianate style and represents one of the earliest periods in the developmental history of residential architecture in Madison. But additionally, this house is a landmark in the broader context of Madison's architectural heritage, not because of its being representative of an Italianate house (there are other, more intact, examples of the Italianate style which retain high integrity in Madison), but instead because of its significance as a vernacular

house form. Vernacular form houses from the 1850s are increasingly rare in Madison and difficult to study due to the way they may be characterized in surveys. This house therefore, is valuable to the study of a period of early vernacular house forms in Madison. Historically, the Madison Landmarks Commission and staff, as articulated in the city-wide survey report of 1994, have advocated that, “[vernacular building types]...play a crucial role in defining the look of the American landscape.” As such, the Robert White House plays a crucial role in representing the historic look of the Madison middle class residential landscape. Furthermore, when this house was proposed to be demolished in 2003, the City’s Preservation Planner submitted to the Landmarks Commission that this house, “one of Madison’s oldest houses, representing the simple frame Italianate houses of Madison’s pioneer era... is [one of the block’s] essential historic elements important for retaining the...character of the neighborhood.”ⁱⁱ

Other Designations

The Robert White House is located within the existing National Register of Historic Places, Fourth Lake Ridge Historic District. The district is roughly bounded by Lake Mendota to the northwest, Giddings Park and N. Brearly Street to the northeast, James Madison Park and N. Franklin Street to the southwest and the southeast side of E. Gorham Street. As a result of the extensive research conducted in the preparation of the nomination, the Robert White House was identified as a contributing resource representing the period of significance and the architectural character of the district.

Furthermore, the Italianate style and vernacular forms of architecture have been recognized in the statewide study of historic themes (subjects) and architecture: the State of Wisconsin’s *Cultural Resource Management Plan* (CRMP). These themes were researched and developed to aid researchers, historians and citizens to understand subjects significant to the history of Wisconsin, and are intended to aid in the evaluation of resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.



ⁱ A detailed description of vernacular housing types is found within *A Field Guide to American Houses*: McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

ⁱⁱ Personal communication from Katherine Rankin, located within the site file for this address.