HISTORIC RESOURCE NOMINATION

Please refer to either the Landmark or Historic District Nomination Form Preparation Guide for instructions on completing this form.

If you need an interpreter, translator, materials in alternate formats or other accommodations to access this form, please call (608) 266-4635

Landmarks Commission
City of Madison Planning Division
215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
PO Box 2985
Madison, WI 53701-2985
(608) 266-6552

1.) Identification of Historic Resource

Resource type (choose one): X Landmark ☐ Historic District

Common Name
Master Hall

Historic Name
Master Hall

Current Use
Apartments

Location of Historic Resource
Street Address
415 West Gilman Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Parcel Number(s)
0709-232-0105-1

Legal Description
The Northeast ½ of Lot Six (6), and all of Lot Seven (7), Block Thirty-Nine (39), in the City of Madison.

2.) Form Prepared By

Name and Title
John D. Rolling, Ph.D.

Organization Represented
Madison Trust for Historic Preservation

641 Orchard Drive, Madison, WI 53711	608-516-9967
Address	*Telephone Number*

jrolling51@gmail.com
Email Address

As the preparer of this document, I am signing below to signify that I believe this document is complete and contains true and accurate information.

John D Rolling	John D. Rolling	February 27, 2026. Revised 3/23/26.
Signature	*Printed Name*	*Date Submitted*

3.) General Historical Data

Original Owner	*Original Use*
Master Hall, Inc.	Private Student Dormitory
Architect/Builder/Designer	*Architectural Style*
Architect: Jordan A. Miller Builder: C.G. Schmidt Inc.	Brutalism
Date of Construction/Period of Significance	*Moved or Original Site?*
Construction 1964-1965/Significance 1964-1973	Original Site

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

The exterior of the building appears to be in good condition. I have not had interior access, but the continued occupancy of the building by several residential tenants suggests interior condition at least average for the building's age and quality.

4.) Describe Present and Original Character and Features

Master Hall is located in downtown Madison four blocks west of the Capitol Square. The site is on the south side of West Gilman Street's 400 block about 150 feet west of State Street.

State Street, which links the Capitol Square with the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, has traditionally been Madison's premier retail and hospitality corridor. Most of the buildings along the 400 and 500 blocks of State Street, i.e., south and north of Gilman Street, are one-to three-story party-wall structures featuring commercial space on the ground floors with apartments on the upper floors. Most date from the 1880s through the 1920s but there are a few newer buildings including " The Hub," a mixed-use, high-rise building on the 500 block built in 2015.

The 400 block of West Gilman Street features a mix of retail and multi-unit apartment uses of varying age and scale. There are several one- to four-story buildings, primarily brick-sided, dating from the 1890s to 1920s housing ground-floor commercial uses with apartments on the upper floors. There are also four older apartment buildings-- the Stratford Atrium at 433 West Gilman, the Victoria at 445 West Gilman, the Arlington at 450 West Gilman and the Eleanor which is addressed as 405 N. Frances but which extends along Gilman Street as well. West Gilman Street is also occupied by the rear facades of two newer mixed-use buildings—The Hub (built 2015) and The James (built 2016). The principal facades of these high-rise buildings face State Street and West Gorham Street/University Avenue respectively. Their Gilman Street sides feature ground-floor commercial space and parking garage doors, with upper floor apartment spaces stepped back from the street.

The buildings immediately adjoining Master Hall are: 1) to the east at 411 West Gilman a one-story free-standing masonry building constructed in 1948 and used as a restaurant; 2) to the west at 421 West Gilman an older (c. 1900) 2.5-story, asbestos-slate-sided 4-unit apartment building; and 3) to the rear or south a newer (2004) brick 6-story apartment building which fronts onto (420) West Gorham Street.

The Master Hall site is rectangular, measuring 99' x 132' for 13,068 square feet. The building fronts directly onto the north line and is set back about 35' from its rear lot line.

Master Hall is steel-reinforced concrete construction over a poured concrete foundation. Floor framing and decking are concrete. Exterior walls are concrete with some face brick trim. Master Hall building is classified as Type III construction, a type of construction in which the exterior walls are of noncombustible materials but interior building components may be combustible.

The building has seven stories plus a small rooftop penthouse. Gross building area is 41,975 square feet. Floors 2-6 (each 5,980 square feet) are cantilevered over the smaller ground floor (4,485 square feet). The rooftop penthouse is 1,610 square feet. [1]

Notable Brutalist design elements are: 1) the upper floors rest on angled piers or *pilotis* jutting out from the ground floor; 2) most of the building's exterior surfaces are exposed (albeit painted) concrete; and 3) the sleeping rooms/studio apartment units present as stacked cubes, each defined by a band of windows recessed within a concrete "*brise soleil*" or "sun shade" which blocks direct summer sun but which admits lower-angle winter sun.

[1] Building areas per City of Madison Assessor property record card. Record data is as of 1/28/2026.

The building was originally constructed to contain 108 individual sleeping rooms, with 18 rooms and a shared kitchen on each of the upper floors while the ground floor contained a lounge and a laundry room. In 1968 the ground floor space was remodeled to office use. In 1973, the sleeping rooms were converted to studio apartment units containing individual kitchenettes.[2] This use continues to the present day.

The north, Gilman-Street-facing, façade includes the main entry on the ground floor. Six *pilotis* frame discrete spaces with floor-to ceiling windows. The upper floors feature eight cubes that jut out toward the street and three inset cubes. Each cube has four metal-framed windows, two of which are operable casements and two of which are fixed. Individual heating units are contained within these cubes and the area below the window belts is trimmed in brown brick.

The ground floor on the west façade presents the same five-bay design as the front façade, but the metal-framed windows here consist of nine lights. The upper floors have the same design as the street side, i.e., stacked cubes some of which jut out beyond the main wall.

The upper floors of the east façade are similar to the north and west facades. The ground floor has windows similar to those of the street façade stretching back about 60 feet, then the wall is blank concrete. There is a stairway accessing a small basement here. This stairway begins at this point 60 feet south of the northeast building corner and extends 18 feet to the basement door.

The south or rear façade is the simplest as regards the ground floor. There is one set of recessed entrance doors at the middle of this elevation and there is a steel service door leading off this entry toward the building's southwest corner. Otherwise the spaces defined by the piers are painted concrete. The upper floors are similar to the other three sides of the building, with alternating outward-jutting and inset cubes.

The Master Hall building is remarkably intact. Few changes appear to have been made to the exterior of the building since its construction during the mid-1960s. Integrity of design, materials, feeling and association remain high. The building's interior was remodeled during the late 1960s and early 1970s. No significance is argued for the interior spaces.

[2] City of Madison Building Permit Files for applications and/or permits dated 1/12/1965, 11/25/1966, 12/21/1967 and 4/19/1973.

5.) Describe Significance of Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria

Per MGO 41.07 or 41.10:

X (a) The landmark/district is associated with broad patterns of cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community.

☐ (b) The landmark/district is associated with the lives of important persons, and/or with important events in national, state, or local history.

☐ (c) The landmark/district encompasses an area of particular archaeological or anthropological significance.

X (d) The landmark/district embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for its representation of a period, style, or method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

☐ (e) The landmark/district is representative of the work of a master builder, designer, or architect.

(a) The landmark is associated with broad patterns of cultural, political, economic, or social history of the community.

The history of Master Hall stands as a stark illustration of change in the mores and modalities of student life at the University of Wisconsin[3] during the 1960s to mid-1970s. As such, it is an important artifact in Madison's social history.

Master Hall was constructed by a Milwaukee-based investment group, Master Hall, Inc., in 1964-65 for use as a privately-owned and -operated dormitory intended for (male) students at the University of Wisconsin.[4] When opened for the 1965-66 school year, Master Hall offered single rooms for "immediate occupancy for single working men or students" at $65.00 per month. Amenities were listed as private showers, maid and linen service, air conditioning, kitchen privileges, a laundry room and a canteen.[5] A "house mother" resided on-site to care for resident needs. [6]

The timing of the construction is significant in that the developers were responding to an explosion in UW-Madison enrollment as the first members of the "baby boom" generation (born 1946-1964) reached college age. Enrollments at UW nearly doubled during the 1960s. While the university built three new high-rise dormitories (Ogg, Sellery and Witte Halls) on an expanded southeast campus during the early 1960s, demand for student housing appeared insatiable.[7] Competing demands for classroom, laboratory, administration and housing space were squeezing the university's construction budget to the

[3] Throughout this document I refer to the "University of Wisconsin" or "UW" rather than "University of Wisconsin-Madison" or "UW-Madison. I do so because the shorter name did pertain at the time that Master Hall was built and for most of the period of significance. The "-Madison" modifier dates from the merger of the former "University of Wisconsin" and the "Wisconsin State University" system in 1971. On the merger, see E. David Cronon and John W. Jenkins, The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1945-1971 (Madison, WI, 1999, pp.520-591.

[4] "Seven-Story Dorm Planned by Group," The Capital Times, June 20, 1964, page 11.

[5] Newspaper advertisement, The Capital Times, October 9, 1965, page 20.

[6] See Wright's Madison City Directory 1968 for 415 West Gilman for presence of a female attendant.

[7] Michael Bridgeman, "Master Hall & Private Dorms," www.madisonpreservation.org/blog/2021/3/31/master-hall-and-private-dorms. Accessed 1/30/2026.

point that in 1962 Wisconsin Governor Gaylord Nelson proposed enrollment limits to avoid needing new buildings. (That initiative failed.)[8]

Private, gender-separated dormitories were not a new concept in 1964. Private dormitories, especially for female UW students, date to the early decades of the 20th century with examples such as Stratford House at 433 W. Gilman Street (1916), Villa Maria at 615 Howard Place (1923) and Ann Emery Hall at 265 Langdon Street (1930). These and other private dormitories, regulated under the "approval" of university officials, were understood as key elements of the *in loco parentis* concept by which the university took responsibility for the moral health of undergraduate students. As late as 1960, the UW Faculty Senate debated extending the then-effective prohibition on unmarried female undergrads under 21 from living in "unapproved" off-campus housing to males as well.[9]

Given the converging mid-1960s dynamics of traditional student housing restrictions plus a surging student population, the developers of Master Hall had reason for optimism that their product would find strong market demand. Other private dormitories were being constructed in Madison during these years, including Lowell Hall at 610 Langdon Street (1961), Allen Hall at 505 N. Frances Street (1962), and The Regent at 1402 Regent Street (1965).

But even as Master Hall was being erected, a sea change in the student housing market was underway. Student involvement during the early 1960's civil rights movement raised questions about parallels to previously accepted social controls exercised by institutions such as higher education. Now the notion that the UW Faculty Senate's Student Life and Interests Committee should have authority to set rules about female students' hours and restrict off-campus living seemed antique. In 1963, elections to the UW Student Senate were won by the SCOPE Party, which campaigned on the platform "…complete liberation of the student from any control of the University other than academic." [10] It was also in 1963 that Law Professor Frank Remington was named to chair a "Committee to Study Non-Curricular Life of Students." The Remington Committee completed its work in 1966, recommending that UW concern itself with only student conduct that: "1) threatens the safety of the University community; 2) threatens the property of the University; and 3) threatens the integrity of the educational process."[11] While the Remington committee's focus was on conduct involving growing student protests, the idea that UW officials should butt out of student non-academic affairs clearly had ramifications for housing choice. Finally, a new Committee on the Roles of Students in the Government of the University, commissioned in August 1967 and reporting in February 1968 called for an end to all UW rules on off-campus housing for students over age 20 or for younger students with parental permission.[12] The practical impact of these two faculty committee reports was to end the UW's role *in loco parentis*.

The impact was soon felt on private dorms. Students began exercising their new housing freedom by choosing mixed-gender off-campus rooming houses, apartments, and housing cooperatives. By 1970, the *Wisconsin State Journal* reported "dismal" occupancy rates for several private dorms under an article titled "Private Dorms Lack 1 Big Item: Students."[13] Several of the private dorms converted to other uses such as offices and elderly housing. Lowell Hall, which had undertaken an expansion for the

[8] E. David Cronon and John W. Jenkins, The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1945-1971, p. 178.
[9] Ibid., pp. 386-387, 423-425, 431.
[10] Ibid., p. 433.
[11] Ibid., p. 435.
[12] Ibid., p. 443.
[13] Wisconsin State Journal, September 16, 1970, page 4.

1967 academic year, faced bankruptcy and was sold to the UW in April 1970 for use as program space and offices for UW Extension. Other buildings shifted their operations from gender-restricted dorm use toward rentals to the general public. Villa Maria began renting rooms to males and non-students in 1970.[14] Even the Stratford House, long a haven for female graduate students, admitted two males in 1971 and was about evenly split between the sexes by 1975.[15]

Master Hall was a clear example of the trend. As early as 1968, the building's owners had converted the ground floor lounge and laundry room to office space for use as a UW counseling center and the UW Behavioral Disabilities Study program. By 1969, the City of Madison's building survey noted that the lodging house use no longer pertained and as of 1971, Wright's City Directory listed the UW programs as the building's only user.[16]

Lender Anchor Savings & Loan foreclosed on the property's mortgage in June 1971 and the building was sold by sheriff's deed to Anchor on September 19, 1972. Anchor subsequently sold the Master Hall property on land contract to Master Hall Associates, an entity controlled by the Mullins family, in May 1973.[17] Master Hall Associates converted the building to studio apartment units, which use remains current as of the date of this nomination.[18]

In sum, Master Hall's experience from its conception in 1964 through to its conversion in 1973 vividly illustrates the boom and bust of Madison's private student dormitories during a period in the city's history when tumultuous change in larger social trends was accompanied by change in student housing patterns.

(d) The landmark embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for its representation of a period, style, or method of construction.

Master Hall is the outstanding Madison example of a multi-unit residential building designed in the Brutalist style.

"Brutalism" is one mode of twentieth –century Modernist architecture. While the Brutalist style is generally considered to have originated after World War II, its underlying concepts were drawn from several earlier trends including the fundamental "form follows function" concept enunciated by Louis Sullivan at the turn of the century, the Bauhaus school of the 1920s, and later Modernists such as Breuer and Le Corbusier. Notable design cues are stacked cube massing, repetitive floor plans, and the use of exposed concrete (*concret brut* per Le Corbusier), *pilotis* or piers, banded fenestration, and *brises soleil* or sun shades. But perhaps the single most telling characteristic is implied by the style's name

[14] "Villa Maria Regains Some of its Classic Shine," Wisconsin State Journal, January 16, 2000, p. 14.
[15] Wrights Madison City Directory, editions for 1971, 1973 and 1975.
[16] City of Madison Building Inspection Files. Permit for office conversion dated 12/21/1967. Building survey dated 11/25/1966 lists building as "lodging house" with 108 rooms on floors 2-7 plus lounge and laundry room on the ground floor. A note on this form, dated 2/5/69, states "No lodging house. Bldg leased to State of Wisconsin."
[17] Lis Pendens dated 6/23/1971 is Dane County Register of Deeds Document # 1294407. Judgment of Foreclosure and Sale is dated 7/20/1971 as Document # 1342033. A Memorandum of Land Contract dated May 1, 1973 is Document # 1367912. The land contract was fulfilled by Warranty Deed dated 9/27/76 as Document # 1386126.
[18] Re the conversion to studio apartments, see an application to the Madison Zoning Board of Appeals dated 4/19/1973 in Madison Building Inspection Files.

itself—a "brutal" or commanding presence on the site and the unapologetic presentation of the building's structure and its service elements—stairways, mechanical systems, etc.

Originally identified by British architectural historian Reyner Banham in a 1955 essay,[19] the distinguishing characteristics of the "New Brutalism" are:

1. Formal legibility of plan.
2. Clear exhibition of structure.
3. Valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found.'

Banham summarizes, "In the last resort what characterizes the New Brutalism in architecture… is its…brutality."[20] It is the sensation of bulk that impresses the viewer. And it is this sensation that elicits visceral reactions. Some laud the style, others detest it. Few are indifferent.[21]

Master Hall was designed by the notable Milwaukee-based architect Jordan A. Miller (1927-2009).[22] Miller, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, had built a reputation for innovation in concrete construction by the time he worked on Master Hall. Exploiting the structural properties of folded plate concrete technology which allowed for exceptionally long spans, he created a distinctive "squiggly roof" design for the Treasure Island/Treasury chain of discount department stores which spread from Wisconsin to California and to several southeastern US states during the 1960s.[23] Miller's plan for the Madison Treasure Island store (1802 West Beltline Highway) earned an "excellence in architecture" award from the Wisconsin Chapter of American Institute of Architects in 1963[24]

---

[19] Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic," Architectural Review, No. 118 (December 1955), pp. 354-361. See also William J.R. Curtis, Modern Architecture since 1900 (3rd ed., London, 1996), p. 550. "If there was some broad period sensibility it perhaps manifested itself in the direct expression of materials, the separation of pieces and elements, the accentuation of service towers and circulation, the overlapping of geometries in plan, and the interlocking of spaces in section."

[20] Banham, "The New Brutalism," p. 358.

[21] Katherine McLaughlin, "Brutalist Architecture: Everything You Need to Know," Architectural Digest, July 23, 2023. https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/brutalist-architecture-101. Accessed 1/27/2026. For a positive appreciation, see Ada Louise Huxtable, On Architecture. New York, 2008, pp. 43, 49-50, 237 and 331. On the other hand, Vincent Scully, Modern Architecture and Other Essays. Princeton, NJ, 2003, pp. 245-246 is a critic.

[22] Miller became one of the Milwaukee-area's foremost architects during the 1960s, 70 and 80s. Miller was the founder of Miller Meier Kenyon Cooper Architects and Engineers with offices in Atlanta and Fort Lauderdale as well as in Milwaukee. The firm was responsible for award-winning Modernist buildings such as the Milwaukee downtown post office, the international terminal at General Mitchell Field, the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex and the Broward County, Florida library. Miller personally designed several notable mid-century-modern residences for his Milwaukee neighbors. See Stephen Filmanowicz, "House of Cards," Milwaukee Magazine, May 1992, pp. 24-36 and https://midcenturymodernmilwaukee.blogspot.com/search/label/Jordan%20Miller. Accessed 2/3/2026.

[23] Marissa Howard, "Treasure Island Retail Giant: An Iconic Mid-Century Discount Store," https://dekalbhistory.org/blog-posts/treasure-island-discount-store-an-iconic-mid-century-roof. Accessed 2/6/2026. See also https://fox6news.com/hidden-treasure-island-wisconsin-demolition-exposes-shuttered-store. Accessed 1/28/2026.

[24] Wisconsin State Journal, April 15, 1963, p. 44. The Madison Treasure Island store site is now occupied by an office user. It is not clear whether the present structure contains the original building, but if so, it has been so altered as to be unrecognizable.

With Master Hall, Miller explored the artistic potential of structural concrete similar to his "squiggly roof" creations for the Treasure Island chain. Like Le Corbusier, Miller lifted the building's residential floors above a ground floor service area through the use of *pilotis*. He stacked the residential units one atop another, defining the cubic-form exteriors with *brises soleils* jutting out from main walls. Excepting the minimal brick trim within each of stacked units, the building's walls are concrete, though in contradistinction to the Brutalist norm, these surfaces are painted. With its seven stories, the building dominated its site—at least in comparison to the one- to four- story neighbors present on the 400 block of West Gilman Street in 1965.

The result is one of Madison's most unique buildings. It is a cardinal example of the Brutalist style. There are other Brutalist buildings in Madison, most on the UW campus and built during the 1960s. The most significant among these are the Mosse Humanities building at 455 North Park Street, the Elvehjem Museum of Art at 800 University Avenue (now one wing of the Chazen Museum of Art), the Hasler Laboratory of Limnology at 680 North Park Street and the Helen C. White Building at 600 North Park Street.[25]

Note that all these buildings are institutional uses. The Master Hall building is unusual in being a multi-unit residence. Another private dormitory building at 1402 Regent Street might be considered as "Brutalist." However, this building was a much simpler design than Master Hall when constructed and it has undergone a series of unsympathetic exterior renovations.

In summary, Master Hall is a rare intact local example of a multi-unit residential building designed in Brutalist style. As such, it is a significant piece of Madison's built environment.

[25] Jim Feldman, Buildings of the University of Wisconsin. Madison, WI, 2006. Available online at: search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AHR5KYLU44F7DU85/full/AT4ZC060KWOJ68G. Accessed 2/23/2026.

6.) List of Bibliographical References

Banham, Reyner. "The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic," Architectural Review, No. 118, December 1955, pp. 345-361.

Bridgeman, Michael. "Master Hall & Private Dorms," www.madisonpreservation.org/blog/2021/3/31/master-hall-and-private-dorms.

Cronon, E. David and Jenkins, John W. The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1945 to 1971. Madison, WI, 1999.

Curtis, William J.R. Modern Architecture Since 1900. 3rd edition, London, 1996.

Feldman, Jim. Buildings of the University of Wisconsin. Madison, WI, 2006.

Filmanowicz, Stephen. "House of Cards," Milwaukee Magazine, May 1992, pp. 24-36.

Howard, Marissa. "Treasure Island Retail Giant: An Iconic Mid-Century Discount Store," https://dekalbhistory.or/blog-posts/treasure-island-discount-store-an-iconic-mid-century-roof

Huxtable, Ada Louise. On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change. New York, 2008.

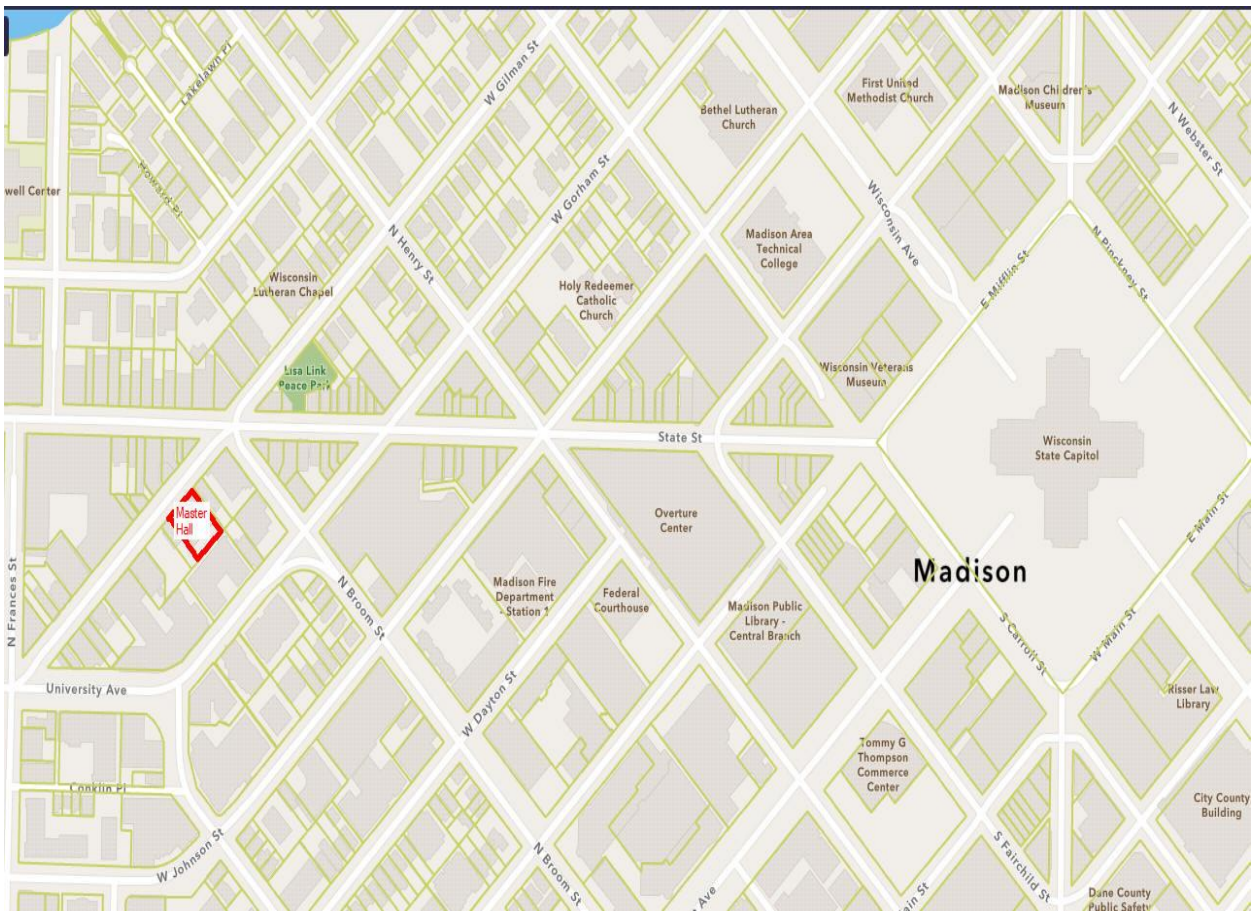
McLaughlin, Katherine. "Brutalist Architecture: Everything You Need to Know," Architectural Digest, July 12, 2023. https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/brutalist-architecture-101.

Rifkind, Carole. A Field Guide to Contemporary American Architecture. New York, 1998.

Scully, Vincent. Modern Architecture and Other Essays. Princeton, NJ, 2003.

7.) Additional Information

Landmark/Historic District Site Map



Map Source: Dane County DCI Maps.
https://dcimapapps.countyofdane.com/dcmapviewer/#widget_11. Accessed 2/24/2026

Photographs

Master Hall context on West Gilman Street. Photo toward SE from NW by John Rolling 2/13/2026.

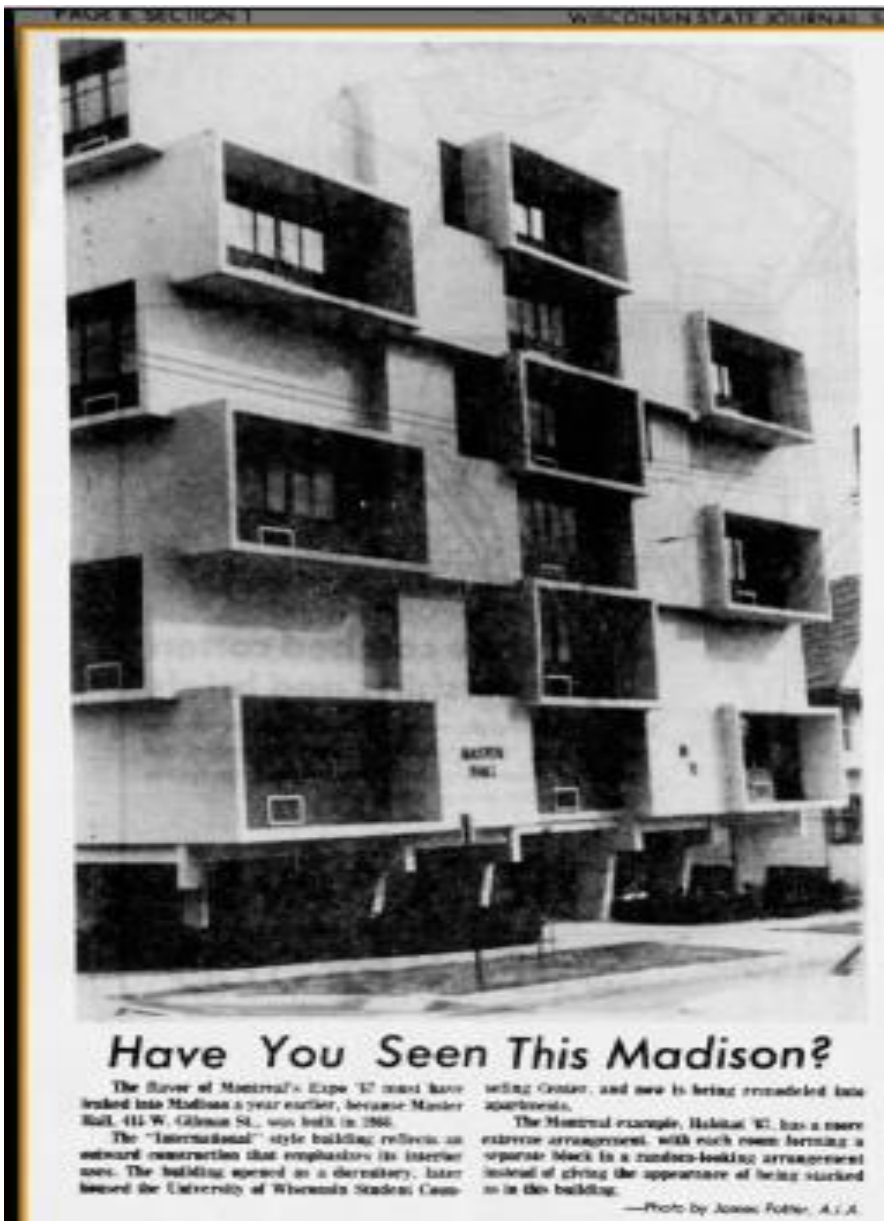
Master Hall North Elevation. Photo SE from NW by John Rolling 2/13/2026.

Master Hall West Elevation. Photo SE from NW by John Rolling 2/13/2026.

Master Hall East Elevation, Upper Floors. Photo NW from SE by John Rolling 2/13/2026.

Master Hall East Elevation, Ground Floor Detail. Photo NW from SE by John Rolling 2/13/2026.

Master Hall South Elevation. Photo NW from SE by John Rolling 2/13/2026.



Have You Seen This Madison?

Photo by James T. Potter, AIA in Wisconsin State Journal 3/3/1974, Section 1, Page 8.

The caption reads: "The flavor of Montreal's Expo '67 must have leaked into Madison a year earlier, because Master Hall, 415 W. Gilman, was built in [*sic*] 1966. The 'International' style building reflects an outward construction that emphasizes its interior uses. … The Montreal example, Habitat '67, has a more extreme arrangement, with each room forming a separate block in a random-looking arrangement instead of giving the appearance of being stacked as in this building."

Potter, an acclaimed Madison architect himself, had a regular newspaper column "Have You Seen This Madison?" in the Sunday edition of the Wisconsin State Journal from 1969 to 1977. The column featured Potter's photographs of Madison's unusual buildings and/or interesting architectural details. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3955. Accessed 3/23/2026.