NPS Form 10-900
(Expires 5/31/2012)
Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

OMB No. 10024-0018

RECEIVED 2280
APR 05 2013
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Oehler Mill Complex
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number W5539 and W5565 County Road MM N/A **not for publication**
city or town Town of Shelby N/A **vicinity**
state Wisconsin **code** WI **county** La Crosse **code** 063 **zip code** 54601

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _ nationally _ statewide X locally. (_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date: April 2, 2013

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _ meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria.
(_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Oehler Mill Complex	La Crosse	Wisconsin
Name of Property	County and State	

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

X entered in the National Register.
___ See continuation sheet.
__ determined eligible for the National Register.
___ See continuation sheet.
__ determined not eligible for the National Register.
___ See continuation sheet.
__ removed from the National Register.
__ other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall — 5.22.13

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as as apply)

X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

X building(s)
district
structure
site
object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing	
4	3	buildings
		sites
1		structures
		objects
5	3	total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/manufacturing facility	VACANT/NOT IN USE
DOMESTIC/single dwelling	DOMESTIC/single dwelling
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/storage	AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/storage

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
Italianate
Late Victorian

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
Foundation Stone
walls Brick
Stone
roof Asphalt
other Wood

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

_ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

_ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

_ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

_ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

_ B removed from its original location.

_ C a birthplace or grave.

_ D a cemetery.

_ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

_ F a commemorative property.

_ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1862-1907

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #___
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #___

Primary location of additional data:
- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- X University
- Other

Name of repository:
___

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 9.5 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	646150	4845830
2			
3			
4			

☐ See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy F. Heggland
organization
street & number 6391 Hillsandwood Road
city or town Mazomanie **state** WI **zip code** 53560
date October 8, 2011
telephone 608-795-2650

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title See Separate List
organization **date**
street & number **telephone**
city or town **state** **zip code**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Description:

The Oehler Mill Complex consists of a 9.50 acre portion of a once larger 124-acre parcel of land owned by the Oehler family. The nominated parcel is located on both sides of County Highway MM approximately one-and-one-half miles southeast of the city of La Crosse and two miles southwest of the unincorporated community of Shelby, both of which are located in La Crosse County.[1] The Complex contains a historic mill building built in 1862 by Valentine and Gottfried Oehler, two brothers who had emigrated from Germany in 1854 and 1855, respectively. It also contains the two houses the brothers built for themselves and their families next to the mill, outbuildings and structures both contributing and non-contributing, built by the Oehlers and later owners. The oldest resource in the complex is the still largely intact sandstone and brick Astylistic Utilitarian Vernacular Form flour mill (Map No. 4) that was built in 1862. Next oldest is a root cellar (Map No. 8) that was built on Valentine Oehler's property in 1876. It was followed, ca.1882, by Valentine Oehler's new brick-clad Italianate style house (Map No. 5). Two years later, in 1884, Gottfried Oehler built a brick Italianate style house (Map No. 2) on his property as well, and later in the century a barn (Map No. 7) was built on the Valentine Oehler property directly across from his house. The Oehler Mill was a rural mill and it was also the first flour mill built in the Town of Shelby in La Crosse County. Today, the Oehler Mill is one of three identified nineteenth century flour mills known to have survived in the entire county and it is by far the most architecturally impressive. Taken together, the contributing resources in the Oehler Mill Complex are believed to be of architectural significance primarily because the mill is now a very rare surviving example of an important historic resource type: the rural flour mill. The survival of the other adjacent Oehler family resources provides an insight into the way in which European milling traditions were brought to Wisconsin and then modified to suit the conditions found here.

The resources within this complex are located in a valley known as Mormon Coulee. Mormon Creek formed Mormon Coulee and the course of the creek runs southwest from its source to the Mississippi River, its mouth being some two miles south of the city of La Crosse. What is now County Highway MM runs south and then east from its western point of intersection with the east-west-running USH 14/61, and the point where it crosses Mormon Creek is located about 3000 feet south of USH 14/61. It is at this point that the Oehler Mill Complex is located. The mill itself is located on the west side of CTH MM some 250-feet to the southwest of it and the Gottfried Oehler house and its associated barns (Map Nos. 1 and 3) are located some 150-200-feet north of the mill, also on the west side of CTH MM. Mormon Creek is located about 250-feet south of the mill and the Valentine Oehler house is located on the west side of CTH MM some 100-feet further south of the Creek and 40-feet to the west of CTH MM. Its associated outbuildings and its one structure (Map Nos. 6, 7, and 8) are located on the

[1] County Highway MM (CTH MM) is also Wisconsin Rustic Road 26 (R26).

east side of CTH MM directly opposite the house and just a few feet from the highway. The mill is located in the flood plain of Mormon Creek and cattle owned by neighboring farms graze the land in and around the floodplain. The two Oehler brothers' houses sit on higher ground to the north and south of the creek; they are surrounded by mown lawns that are dotted with large ornamental shade trees and access to each is via gravel driveway exits onto CTH MM.

INVENTORY

The following inventory lists all the resources in the mill complex, the resource's contributing (C) or non-contributing (NC) status, the type of the resource, the map number, and, when available, the name, and the construction date of the resource.

C/NC	Original Name	Date	Type	Map No.
NC	Swing Family Barn	1998	Building	1
C	Gottfried Oehler House	Ca.1884	Building	2
NC	Swing Family Pole Barn	1988	Building	3
C	Oehler Flour and Grist Mill	1862	Building	4
C	Valentine Oehler House	Ca.1882	Building	5
NC	Jahnel Family Garage	post-1923	Building	6
C	Oehler Family Barn	pre-1907	Building	7
C	Oehler Family Root Cellar	1876	Structure	8

Map No. 1 Swing Family Barn Non-Contributing 1998[2]

This L-plan barn was built in 1998 using lumber and other materials from an earlier collapsed barn on this site. The main portion of the present barn measures 32.5-feet-wide by 56-feet-deep and it is two-stories-tall (internally), it is rectilinear in plan, has a gable roof whose ridgeline runs northwest-southeast, and its main façade faces southeast and is 32.5-feet-wide. In addition, an 11.5-foot-wide by 23.5-foot-deep shed-roofed one-story ell is attached to the rear of the southwest-facing side elevation of the main portion of the barn, which gives the overall building its L-plan footprint.

The barn has a poured concrete pad foundation and the walls of the southeast-facing main facades of both the main portion and of the ell are clad in weathered, unpainted vertical board siding that once covered the earlier barn. All of the barn's other walls, however, are clad in modern metal siding and

[2] Interview with Jeanne Swing Pavela. August 15, 2011.

these walls are sheltered by the wide overhanging eaves of the barn's roof, which is clad in standing seam metal. There are no openings of any kind on the barn's northeast-facing side elevation and its northwest-facing rear elevation. There are, however, large openings in the main façade of both the main portion of the barn and the ell that contain overhead garage doors. There is also a small door opening placed near the mid-point on the southwest-facing side elevation of the main portion of the barn that contains a door constructed of weathered, unpainted vertical boards. In addition, window openings are placed in the south corner of the upper story of the main portion of the barn on the main facade, but these openings have not been glazed.

This building is in good condition and it is used primarily for storage.

Map No. 2 Gottfried Oehler House Contributing Ca.1884

The Italianate style Gottfried Oehler house consists of an almost square plan two-story-tall main block with an attached a two-story rectilinear plan ell on its southwest side. The entire house rests on roughly coursed stone foundation walls that are visible above grade and these walls enclose a full basement story. The exterior walls that rest on this foundation are clad in red brick and these walls rise up to a plain wooden frieze board that is located just below the wide overhanging boxed eaves that encircle the entire house. These eaves are not supported by the wood brackets commonly used to ornament Italianate style houses. They originally had wood board soffits but these have now mostly been replaced with vented aluminum, except in the house's two gable ends where the original wooden boards are still intact. A very shallow-pitched, standing seam metal hip roof shelters the entire house.

The main block has a symmetrically designed principal façade that faces southeast and it is three-bays-wide and measures 35-feet-across. The first story of the center bay consists of a large segmental-arched opening that contains the main entrance to the house and this opening now contains a twenty-eight-panel solid wood door that is flanked on both sides by five-light side lights and it is surmounted by a large rectangular transom that has a circular center light and five other lights that are created by four muntins that radiate out from this circle.[3] This entrance is then sheltered by a nearly flat-roofed open entrance porch that consists of an entablature supported by two simple Tuscan Order columns and two engaged Tuscan Order half-round columns. Flanking this entrance on either side are single segmental-arched window openings that have dressed stone sills and segmental-arched dressed stone heads ornamented with keystones; each of these openings contains a one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that has snap-in muntins that give it a nine-over-nine-light appearance. The second story above has a window of identical design in each of its three bays but these windows are shorter

[3] This door, the sidelights, and the transom are all later replacements for the entrance's original elements.

than those of the first story and they have snap-in muntins that give it a six-over-six-light appearance. This facade is crowned by a broad but low gable end that spans just the width of the center bay and this gable end has a small circular one-light window that is outlined with header bricks centered on its wall surface.

The symmetrically designed northeast-facing side elevation of the house is four-bays-wide and measures 38.25-feet across. Both stories of each bay contain segmental-arched window openings that are identical to the ones just described on the main façade. A broad but low gable end that spans just the width of the space between the second and third bay is centered on this elevation and it too has a small circular one-light window centered on the wall surface of this gable end and it is outlined with header bricks.[4]

The northwest-facing rear elevation of the house is the most altered of the four. This elevation is 41-feet-wide and it is believed that it was also originally four-bays-wide and that both stories of the three left-hand bays originally contained a segmental-arched window opening that was identical in size and design to the ones found on the other elevations with two exceptions: on this elevation, the window heads consist of two courses of header brick rather than dressed stone, although they do have dressed stone keystones; and the first story of the first bay from the right originally contained a door opening rather than a window and there was no opening in the story above it. Sometime in the twentieth century, most likely, the first story window opening in the left-hand bay and possibly the second story one as well were both converted into door openings and an enclosed, shed-roofed, clapboard-clad exterior staircase was built that spanned the width of both the first story and second stories of this bay and also the second story of the second bay from the left as well to serve these new entrances. This staircase ell is still extant. The original first story door opening has now been filled in with plywood and a pair of small one-light windows was placed in the second story between the second and third bays.

The southwest-facing side elevation of the house is also four-bays-wide and it also measures 38.25-feet across. Both stories of each bay contain segmental-arched window openings that are identical to the ones described on the main façade and the northeast-facing side elevation; however, on this elevation, the two left-hand bays are located in an 18.5-foot-wide by six-foot-deep two-story-tall ell that projects out from the main wall surface. The reason for this is that an entrance door that opens into the house's

[4] This small window contains a mystery. Painted on the glass are the numbers "882" which probably represents a portion of the date "1882." It is known, however, that Gottfried Oehler's former house on this site was destroyed by fire in 1883 and that he built the current house soon thereafter. So what does "882" refer too? Possibly it represents the date of construction of Oehler's previous house and it could, perhaps, have been located somewhere on that house and then been recovered from the debris, but this is pure speculation.

kitchen is set into the first story of the southeast-facing side of this ell and this entrance is sheltered by an open, nearly-flat-roofed one-story-tall side porch that spans the width of the two right-hand bays. This roof of this rectilinear plan porch is supported by two Tuscan Order columns and two engaged Tuscan Order columns that are identical to the ones that support the front entrance porch. A historic photo shows that both of these porches are later replacements for the originals.[5]

The interior of the house was visited for this nomination but was not photographed at the request of the owner. The first story has a central hall with a staircase and there are two rooms placed to its right and two to its left. Most of the original first story window and door casings, the baseboards, the wood board floors, and the plaster walls and ceilings are intact but, at some point in the Betz family's period of occupancy, the original staircase was removed and the doors that opened into the stair hall from the rooms on either side at the front of the house were removed and the openings were given an arched shape that was more in keeping with the taste of the times.

Map No. 3 **Swing Family Pole Barn** **Non-Contributing** **1988**[6]

This pole barn was built in 1988 and it measures 42.5-feet-wide by 72-feet-deep and it is one-story-tall, it is rectilinear in plan, it has a gable roof whose ridgeline runs northeast-southwest, and its main façade faces northeast and is 42.5-feet-wide. The barn has a poured concrete pad foundation and its walls are all clad in metal siding and they are sheltered by the barn's standing seam metal-clad gable roof. A large garage door opening occupies the left half of the main façade while a small entrance door and a single window opening that contains two one-light windows is placed to its right. There is a sliding barn door located on the southeast-facing side elevation of the building and another entrance door and a single window opening that contains two one-light windows is located on the barn's northwest-facing side elevation.

Map No. 4 **Oehler Mill** **Contributing** **1862**[7]

The Astylistic Utilitarian Vernacular Form Oehler flour mill was built in 1862 and it is rectilinear in plan and measures 46-feet-wide by 32.5-feet-deep. The mill has a Side Gable design, it is two-stories-tall, and it rests on massive coursed rubble sandstone foundation walls that originally enclosed a full basement story. The 16-inch-thick exterior walls that rest on this foundation are also fashioned out of coursed rubble stone and larger, partially dressed blocks of this stone form quoins at each corner of the

[5] See: Godden, Laura M. <http://www.oehlermill.org> "Photos: Oehler Photos; Second Generation of Oehlers."
[6] Interview with Jeanne Swing Pavela. August 15, 2011.
[7] *La Crosse Democrat*. May 26, 1862.

building. The area of the gable end is of brick. The overhanging open eaves of the side gable main roof, the slopes of which are clad in older standing seam metal sheets, shelter the walls. There is a small, square plan gable roofed wooden ventilator placed on the northeast slope of the roof and a larger, gable-roofed, clapboard-clad dormer containing two eight-light windows is located on the southwest-facing slope.

The 46-foot-wide northeast-facing rear elevation of the mill faces towards County Highway MM and it is four-bays-wide. Both stories of the two left-hand bays each contains a single semi-circular-arched window opening that has a roughly dressed stone sill and roughly dressed stone vousssoirs units that encircle the window head. Historic photos show that the window openings in this and the mill's other elevations all originally contained fixed, six-light wood sash windows, each of which was crowned by a five-light semi-circular-arched wood sash transom. Remnants of these original windows are still present in many of the openings and enough original material exists to make accurate reproductions if so desired. The second story of the third bay from the left also contains one of these window openings, but a rectangular window or door opening having a wooden lintel is positioned between the second and third bays in the first story below and a larger door opening that has a massive wooden lintel is located in the first story of the fourth bay from the left; this opening now contains a wood board door of considerable age.

The 32.5-foot-wide southeast-facing side elevation of the mill is two bays-wide and both stories of its left-hand bay and the second story of the right-hand bay each contains a single semi-circular-arched window opening of the type just described, while the first story of the right-hand bay contains a single rectilinear window opening. This elevation is then crowned by the southeast-facing main gable end, which is clad in red brick and in whose center is placed a semicircular window opening that is nearly identical to the transoms found on the main windows in the stories below and which has a header brick sill and soldier brick surround.

The 46-foot-wide southwest-facing main elevation of the mill is three-bays-wide and both stories of each bay contain a single semi-circular-arched window opening of the type that is found on the mill's other elevations and which is described above. Historic photos, however, show that originally the basement story of this elevation was also fully exposed and it too was three-bays-wide and had identical window openings in its right and left-hand bays while its center bay had a wider segmental-arched opening that contained a pair of heavy wood board doors. This basement story has now been covered over, and the basement itself has been filled in as well.

The 32.5-foot-wide northwest-facing side elevation of the mill is three bays-wide and the second story of the right-hand bay contains a single semi-circular-arched window opening of the type described

above, while the first story of this bay contains a single rectilinear door opening. There are no other openings in the elevation's first story but there is a large rectangular opening in the second story of the left-hand bay that has a massive wood lintel above it and the second story of the middle bay has an even larger rectangular opening that may be the result of a later alteration and which contains a side-hinged wood board door. This elevation is crowned by the southeast-facing main gable end, which is clad in red brick and in whose center is placed a six light window topped by a semi-circular transom.

As noted above, the basement story has now been filled in and is inaccessible. The interior of the two upper stories, however, is still largely intact. The first story consists of a single room that has plastered walls and in the room's center are two one-foot-square wood posts with chamfered corners that support the massive main wood joist that supports the floor of the story above. A straight run wood staircase placed against the northwest wall of this room leads up to the second story, which also consists of a single large room that is now open to the roof decking. Originally the mill also contained an attic story at the level of the slope of the roof; this has been removed. This second story's floor consists of wood boards and the walls are plastered as well. All the window openings on the long walls of both stories have simple wood sills and massive wood lintels, while the window openings in the end elevations have the same wood sills but lack the wood lintels.

Historic photos of the mill suggests that its water wheel was housed in a separate building that was placed directly over the millrace, which is located some thirty-feet southeast of the mill. This building is no longer extant and this is also true of wooden ells that were added to the two side elevations of the mill over time.[8]

Map No. 5 **Valentine Oehler House** **Contributing** **Ca.1882**

The Italianate style Valentine Oehler house consists of a rectilinear plan, two-story-tall main block built ca.1882, to whose southeast-facing side elevation is attached a one-and-one-half-story-tall rectilinear plan kitchen ell that was built between 1922 and 1930 and which replaced the original wing. The main block of the house measures 16-feet-wide by 28-feet-deep and it rests on roughly coursed stone foundation walls that are visible above grade and these walls enclose a full basement story. The exterior walls that rest on this foundation are clad in red brick and these walls rise up to a plain wooden frieze board that is located just below the wide overhanging boxed eaves that encircle the entire house. These eaves are not supported by wood brackets of the kind that are commonly used to ornament Italianate style houses and they have wood board soffits. A very shallow-pitched, standing seam metal-covered hip roof shelters the entire block.

[8] See: Godden, Laura M. <http://www.oehlermill.org> "External photos of the Oehler Mill and Houses."

The main block has an asymmetrically designed principal façade that faces northeast onto County Highway MM and it is three-bays-wide and measures 16-feet-across. The first story of the left-hand bay contains the main entrance to the house and this opening still contains it original two-panel, two-light wood entrance door, which is surmounted by a large rectangular transom that is enframed by the door opening's shouldered, rectilinear dressed stone head. The first stories of the middle and right-hand bays each contains a single tall window opening that has a dressed stone sill and a shouldered, rectilinear dressed stone head; each opening contains an original four-over-four-light double hung wood sash window. The entire first story is then sheltered by a nearly flat-roofed open porch that spans the width of the façade. The porch's ceiling consists of wooden boards, but the porch is now supported by simple posts and the porch also now has a raised concrete floor, both posts and floor being the result of a later remodeling.[9] The second story above has a four- over-four-light window in each of its three bays, but these windows are slightly shorter than the first story windows. They also have dressed stone sills; each window has a shouldered, triangular arched dressed stone window head as well.

The symmetrically designed northwest-facing side elevation of the house is two-bays-wide and measures 28-feet across. Both stories of each bay contain window openings that are identical to the ones just described on the main façade, with the first story ones being taller than the ones in the second story. On this elevation, all of the window openings have shouldered, triangular arched dressed stone window heads.

The southwest-facing rear elevation of the main block also measures 16-feet-across and it is three-bays-wide. The first story has a single centered window opening that is identical to the block's other first story windows, while the two second story windows above are identical to the block's other second story windows. All three of these windows have shouldered, triangular arched dressed stone window heads as well.

The southeast-facing side elevation of the main block, however, has always been mostly covered over by either the original kitchen wing or by its successor, the present wing, and it has no exterior openings set into its brick-clad wall surface.

Between 1922 and 1930, the Jahnel family built the present kitchen wing. It replaced the original gable-roofed, one-and-one-half-story-tall board-and-batten-clad kitchen wing that probably pre-dated

[9] Historic photos show that this porch originally has a wooden floor and that its roof was upheld by very narrow paired posts that were ornamented with scroll sawn wooden brackets.

the main block.[10] The present wing measures 16-feet-wide by 36-feet-deep and it is rectilinear in plan and two-stories tall and its first story is clad in red brick. The second story, however, consists of a much smaller 16-foot-wide by 12-foot-deep one-story Mansard-roofed element that is centered on the wing. This story has windows on its northeast and southwest-facing sides that look out onto the very gentle slopes of the roofs that cover the rest of the first story of the wing, and both of these slopes and also the Mansard roof that covers the wing's second story are all clad in standing seam metal roofing.

The southeast-facing side elevation of this wing has enclosed porches inset into both its southwest and northeast corners and there are three one-over-one-light windows centered in the wall surface of the first story between them. The southeast-facing end elevation of the second story above these three windows has a single one-over-one-light window centered on it and the wall surface of this end of the second story is clad in asphalt shingles.

A metal fence (not in count) separates the home's front yard from the road. This appears to be the same, or a nearly identical, fence seen in photographs of the house and family identified as taken in the 1880s.

Map No. 6 **Jahnel Family Garage** **Non-Contributing** **post-1923**

This small rectilinear plan single car garage is located directly across County Highway MM from the Valentine Oehler house, which it served, and it measures 10.5-feet-wide by 19-feet-long. The building has a concrete pad floor and its walls are clad in drop siding with the exception of its northeast-facing side elevation, which is now clad in fiberglass panels. The building is sheltered by the building's gable roof, whose ridgeline runs northwest-southeast, and whose slopes are covered with ridged metal panels. The garage's main façade faces southeast and it contains a single garage door opening that is now closed by a modern overhead door.

Historic photos show that this building was not extant in 1923, when a new bridge was built across Mormon Creek by La Crosse County next to the garage site, so it was therefore built during the Jahnel's period of ownership, which began in 1922, but the actual date of construction is unknown. It appears, however, to have been built sometime between 1923 and 1940.[11]

Map No. 7 **Oehler Family Barn** **Contributing** **pre-1907**

[10] For a further discussion of this house's original wing see Section 8, pp. 16-17 of this nomination form.
[11] See: Godden, Laura M. <http://www.oehlermill.org> "Photos: The Oehler Cave Park, Oehler Fish Pond, and Mormon Creek."

This rectilinear plan barn is located directly across County Highway MM from the Valentine Oehler house, which it served, and it measures 55-feet-wide by 22-feet-deep and is two-stories-tall. The original foundation of this barn has been replaced and the barn's first story walls are now comprised of three courses of concrete block topped by eleven courses of hollow building tile. The second story, above, however, is original and its walls are clad in clapboards and they are sheltered by the barn's gable roof, whose ridgeline runs northeast-southwest, and whose slopes are covered in old standing seam metal. In addition, there is also a one-story-tall, clapboard-clad, rectilinear plan, shed-roofed ell attached across the first story of the barn's northeast-facing side elevation that was built sometime after 1923.

The main façade of the barn has an asymmetrical design, it faces northwest, and its first story contains two door openings, three barn door openings, the left-hand one of which contains a swing-up wooden door and the other two modern overhead garage doors, and, at the far right, there is also a single six-over-six-light double hung wood sash window.[12] The second story above contains three more single six-over-six-light double hung wood sash windows, and a second story door opening is also positioned between the second and third windows from the right.

The 22-foot-wide southwest-facing side elevation of the barn has three single six-over-six-light double hung wood sash windows arrayed across its width, there are two more in the second story above, and a third is placed high up in the elevation's gable end.[13]

Historic photos show that this building was built prior to 1907, the year when the Oehlers built a new enclosed picnic house (non-extant) on the bluff overlooking Oehler's Cave, but the actual date of construction is unknown.[14] It is possible, however, given its relatively simple design that it dates back to Valentine Oehler's time. These photos also show that the barn originally was of the forebay type which, the CRMP states, is "a slight extension of the upper floor over the lower along the long wall, cantilevered or supported by posts. The forebay provides a sheltered area for animals and usually contains one or more doors for animal entry."[15] It is possible that the first story of this barn suffered flood damage in the severe flood of 1941 that destroyed the Oehler dam but there is no evidence to support this contention.

---

[12] There is also a flat-arched barn door opening in the northwest-facing elevation of the shed-roofed ell as well and it also contains a swing-up wooden door.
[13] All of this barn's windows appear to be original and intact.
[14] See: Godden, Laura M. <http://www.oehlermill.org> "Photos: The Oehler Cave Park, Oehler Fish Pond, and Mormon Creek."
[15] Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin.* Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986. Vol. 2, Architecture, Agricultural Outbuildings, p. 5-2.

Map No. 8 **Oehler Family Root Cellar** **Contributing** **1876**

This root cellar is dug into the hillside opposite the Valentine Oehler house and it is accessed directly from the highway. One enters the cellar by passing through a massive wood door that has two lights set into it. This door is deeply inset into an equally massive stone entrance vestibule whose walls are covered in stucco and which is sheltered by an asphalt-shingle-covered gable roof whose gable end is hidden by an asphalt shingle-covered Boomtown style-like false front that is placed above the entrance. This grotto-like structure consists of three rooms that were carved by hand out of the solid sandstone hillside. Each room is from seven to eight-feet tall, has an arched ceiling, and arched openings lead from one room to the next. The smallest of the three rooms also has a 2x2-foot-square six-light window set into its west wall that looks out onto the highway and the entire three-room structure contains approximately 360 square feet of floor space. Reputedly it took one man one hundred days to carve out the cellar and he carved the date "1876" into the wall of one of the rooms as well.[16]

Integrity

All of the contributing buildings in the complex have been altered somewhat but none of the changes have been so drastic as to prevent the building from accurately portraying its part of the overall story of the complex during the period of significance. In addition, it is believed that the collective significance of the contributing buildings outweighs any loss of integrity that any one of the buildings might have suffered.

The site of the former Oehler pleasure grounds and its associated picnic pavilion is now occupied by a large modern house that was built by the Pavela family and the pavilion is no longer extant. In addition, the Oehler cave site and the ruinous remains of the Oehler dam (destroyed by floods in the 1950s) now lie within the boundaries of the land that the Swing/Pavela family donated to the Diocese of La Crosse for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and while these resources are still extant they now belong to the Diocese.

[16] "Jahnel Root Cellar has Roots in History." Westby, WI: Vernon Electric Cooperative. 1987. This article appeared in a newsletter published by the cooperative in 1987. Mrs. Jeanne Pavela has a copy.

Significance

The Oehler Mill Complex is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its local significance under National Register (NR) Criterion C, architecture. It is significant at the local level with a period of significance of 1862-1907, dates encompassing the construction of the mill and the associated buildings of the milling complex. Research was undertaken to assess this potential utilizing the NR significance area of Architecture, a theme that is also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). This research centered on evaluating the resources in the Complex utilizing the Italianate Style and Stone Construction subsections of the Architectural Styles study unit, and the Milling subsection of the Industry study unit portions of the CRMP.[17] The results of this research are detailed below and determined that the Complex's fine stone and brick Astylistic Utilitarian Vernacular Form flour mill building and its two fine associated brick Italianate style houses are locally significant under Criterion C, architecture. The mill is a now exceptionally rare example of an early rural flour and grist mill and its significance is heightened by the fact that the houses of Valentine Oehler and Gottfried Oehler, the two brothers who built it and ran it, are both extant and are situated on either side of it.

The Oehler Mill was built in 1862 by Valentine and Gottfried Oehler, recent immigrants from Germany, and it is a fine example of what was once a common and highly important resource type in Wisconsin: the rural flour and grist mill. This was actually the second mill the brothers built at this location on Mormon Creek. The first was a sawmill, built in 1857, that in 1858 they converted into a flour and grist mill. By 1862, their apparent success allowed them to build the current larger and much more substantial stone building on the same site. The success of their new mill also allowed them to build new houses for their respective families on either side of the mill in the early 1880s; Gottfried's house, which was built just to the north in 1884, and Valentine's house was built just to the south ca.1882. Both houses replaced earlier houses that the brothers had built on the same sites. The new houses are examples of subtypes of the Italianate style, and both are built of brick furnished by the Mormon Coulee Brick Yard, which had been established less than a mile to the north in 1881 and which continued producing brick until 1958. The brothers and members of later generations of their families continued to live in these two houses until 1922, after which the houses and their lands passed on to new owners. Likewise, the family operated the Oehler Mill until it was finally closed in 1918 and it too then passed into other hands and was never reopened. Research has found that rural flour mills of this type are now the rarest type of flour mill remaining in Wisconsin and the Oehler Mill's significance as a now very rare resource type is enhanced by the presence of the adjacent homes of the family that was historically associated with it. The period of significance for architecture runs from

[17] Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Op. Cit. Vol. 2.

1862 to 1907, which spans the years during which the houses, the mill, the barn, and the root cellar were built.

History

The Oehler Mill Complex is located southeast of the present southern corporate boundary of the City of La Crosse. The first purchase of land at this site by a member of the Oehler family occurred in 1855. This location was previously the site of one of the earliest, albeit very short-lived, settlements of Euro-Americans that occurred in the vicinity of this future city. Beginning in September of 1841, a company of Mormon men was sent north from their home base in Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Black River pinery area, which is located some fifty miles north of the city of La Crosse, in order to get lumber for the erection of a new temple in Nauvoo and other buildings.

> These and others who came later not only cut pine timber but also had contracted to buy a sawmill and manufacturing lumber. This work was continued during the three following years, rafts of dimension lumber being received at Nauvoo containing many thousand feet of lumber.
>
> Accompanying this activity was an attempt to found a colony in the pinery. On July 21, 1843, the *Maid of Iowa*, a small steamboat owned by the church, left Nauvoo with a company of brethren and their families. They settled near the present Black River Falls. Their leaders were Lyman Wight, designated 'President' and George A. Miller 'Bishop.' We shall not follow the vicissitudes of either the lumbermen or the settlers in the pinery. The last raft went down the river to Nauvoo in July, 1844. The work on the temple was finished the following year. This band of settlers returned to Nauvoo with the lumbermen that summer.[18]

A few months later, Wight decided to make a second attempt at founding a colony in Wisconsin, this time choosing what appeared to be a favorable site in a valley located just a few miles south of the site of today's city of La Crosse.

> A series of rugged bluffs bounds on the east the open prairie on which, at the margin of the Mississippi river, the hamlet Prairie La Crosse began its existence in 1842. The prairie was a treeless waste, with hillocks and hollows of wind-blown sand, the bed of the ancient river that cut this trough three miles wide and 500 feet below the level of the surrounding country. It was worthless agriculturally, except at the immediate foot of the bluffs. But where the breaks in

[18] Sanford, Albert H. "Mormons of the Coulee." Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin. *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. XXIV, No. 2, December, 1940, pp. 131-132.

> this line of bluffs occur fertile coulees watered by clear streams led the first farmers back where there was rich soil for abundant crops.
>
> The southernmost of these coulees at the rear of the present city of La Crosse has been called, almost since the earliest settlement, 'Mormon Coulee.' ... Today [1940] one reaches the wide mouth of Mormon Coulee from La Crosse by a five-mile ride in a southeasterly direction on United States highway 14. Thence this highway follows the coulee for an equal distance, then leaves it for a steep ascent to the ridge above. The narrowing coulee winds eastward two or three miles further.[19]

By November of 1844, Wight's group, numbering about 160 men, women, and children, had established a settlement in what is now called Mormon Coulee that was afterwards described as follows.

> On February 24, 1878, an article appeared in the La Crosse *Liberal Democrat*, published by John Symes and Ellis B. Usher. Mr. Symes, whose father was an early settler in Mormon coulee, was the author. According to this story the Mormons had about twenty log buildings laid out as a town with a main street that extended across the coulee from a point where the Oehler brothers built a sawmill later. Further, the remains of a millstone and a limekiln were found here.[20]

The winter of 1844 proved to be a harsh one for the settlers and in the spring of 1845 they burned their buildings and returned to Nauvoo. Many then journeyed onward to another new settlement in Texas, while others went with Brigham Young to Utah. Their short stay in the La Crosse area was remembered in the name that afterwards was given to the long valley where they settled, which became known as Mormon Coulee and also to the stream that ran through it, which became known as Mormon Creek. Three years later in 1848, the first permanent settlers in the Mormon Coulee appeared: John and Charles Nagle, who bought land between the Mississippi and the Coulee, and James Conlan, who filed a claim for 40 acres in the Coulee in the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 23 of what in 1867 would become the Town of Shelby.

It was the existence of Mormon Creek though, that determined the future history of the site where the Mormon's short-lived settlement had been located. The reason for this was the creek's water power potential and this potential had actually been foreseen in a letter that Asher and Efflender Gressmen,

---

[19] Sanford, Albert H. Op. Cit., p. 129.
[20] Ibid, p. 138.

two members of the Mormon settlement, sent to Levi Moffett, a fellow coreligionist located in Iowa in the winter of 1844. In this letter they describe the site of the Mormon Coulee settlement as follows:

> I have not time to write more and tell you of our prospects. Here is a great mining country and the best mill site I ever saw. By building a dam a hundred feet long you can raise the water level forty feet high, if you choose. The stream is about twelve feet wide and will average two feet deep at any season of the year, with a rapid current and the best water I ever drank, supported by springs.[21]

Further evidence of the good water potential of this site is to be found in the notes of the original federal land surveyor of this portion of the state, who noted in his field survey notes of the line between Sections 23 and 26 that about five chains below the place where Mormon Creek crosses the line between the sections "there is a good mill site with sandstone banks."[22]

It was this water power potential that appears to have been the determining factor in Valentine Oehler's decision to buy 40 acres bordering the Creek from James Conlan in 1855 for $1400.00. Valentine Oehler (1821-1891) was born in Croben (aka Krobern), which is near the city of Altenburg in the province of Saxony in Germany. Oehler was the son of Jacob Oehler (1797-1877) and Justine Poehlitz Oehler (1800-1876) and he was the oldest of the six children born to this couple. Oehler had immigrated to Wisconsin in 1854, probably with his sister, Maria, and his decision to come to Wisconsin was reasonable because by this time German immigrants made up the second largest group of foreign-born citizens in the state.

> Many Germans settled in Wisconsin in the 1840s, and German settlement was propelled to great heights in the decades of 1840-1850, 1850-1860, and 1880-1890. Settlement was particularly heavy in the years between 1846 and 1854 and between 1881 and 1884. In 1850, the federal census recorded 38,064 Germans in Wisconsin. Besides the British, the Germans were the most numerous foreign element in Wisconsin at this time. The German population grew so rapidly in the 1850s that by 1860, with a population of 123,879, Germans achieved numerical primacy among all foreign-born groups in the state.[23]

---

[21] Sanford, Albert H. Op. Cit., pp. 135-136. They were wrong about the mining, but not about the water power potential of the site.
[22] The Oehler Mill Complex is located in Section 26. Section 23 is located directly north of Section 26. Board of Commissioners of Public Lands. Interior Field Notes T15N, R7W. (INT06W02: Nov. 1846, p. 15). See: <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/SurveyInfo.html>
[23] Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. 2-2 (Settlement).

Valentine Oehler's decision to continue westward to La Crosse County was also reasonable; by this time, La Crosse County had the highest percentage of German immigrants of any county in the western third of the state. No documentation has survived that spells out Oehler's reasons for coming to this country or to La Crosse, but Oehler's father, Jacob, was a miller by trade, as was Valentine and both of his younger brothers, Gottfried Oehler (1824-1895) and Ernest Oehler (1834-1911).[24] So when Valentine arrived in La Crosse in 1854 in advance of the rest of his family, it was apparently with the intent of either purchasing an existing mill or purchasing land where such a mill could be built, which then, presumably, would be owned and run by the brothers, possibly with the help or at least the advice of their 57-year-old father. In any case, by the time Oehler's father, mother, three siblings, and other relatives arrived in La Crosse the following year he had already purchased land in Mormon Coulee that contained an ideal place for the construction of such a mill.

Once the Oehler family had reassembled in La Crosse later in 1855, the brothers began work on the mill site itself. The first mill was built in 1857 and to bring water to the mill and to ensure that sufficient water power was available to drive the mill's machinery, the brothers also built a limestone dam across the creek in 1857 just upstream from a very large natural cave (afterwards called 'Oehler's Cave') that the stream had worn into a limestone bluff that edges a bend in the creek. This extremely well built 100-foot-wide coursed masonry overflow gravity dam was constructed of stacked, quarried limestone blocks and its width was further extended by an earthen dike. This dam and its associated dike impounded a teardrop-shaped mill pond north of the dam that measured about a half-mile long by about an eighth-of-a-mile wide and some measure of flood control was achieved by the extreme expedient of hand digging an eight-foot-wide by eight-foot-tall by twenty-foot-long outlet tunnel through the solid rock formation that is located at the west end of the dam.[25] Water to power the mill was then sent down a hand dug millrace to the mill itself.[26]

The first Oehler mill was built in 1857 as a saw mill. Nothing is known of its design and even its exact location is not certain, although it was probably located where the current mill building is now. Within a year, however, the mill was converted into a grist mill, probably in response to the growing needs of the agricultural community that was evolving in the Coulee and its vicinity at that time.[27] The

[24] Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild. "Ship Marianne." ISTG Vol. 8. See: http://immigrantships.net/v8/1800v8/marianne18550718.html

[25] Some remnants of this dam still survive today as does the entire outlet tunnel. For a recent account of a visit to the dam and tunnel site see: Faeth, Emily. "Hidden History." La Crosse: *Second Supper (La Crosse's Free Press),* July 30, 2009. Also available at http://secondsupper.com/story.php?s=103

[26] This millrace is still clearly visible in current aerial views of the mill site.

[27] Hirshheimer, H. J. "Manufacturing in La Crosse, 1853-1880." La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Sketches: Series 4. 1938. p. 41. See also: *La Crosse Democrat.* May 26, 1862.

Oehlers' new mill was apparently financially successful because in 1858 Gottfried Oehler married Margaretha Windler (or Eindler), and in the same year Valentine Oehler and his wife, Sophie, had their first child, Edward Oehler (1858-1939).

By 1862, the Oehler brothers were successful enough to justify the construction of an entirely new mill building, this being the one that is still extant in Mormon Coulee today.[28] The Oehlers' new mill (Map No. 4) was a flour mill and it measured 46-feet-wide by 32.5-feet-deep and contained three run of stone. The evidence of other La Crosse County flouring and grist mills of this period that has survived strongly suggests that the Oehlers' new two-story-tall stone and brick mill must have been both the most impressive building for many miles around in 1862 and it was also one of the most impressive mill buildings in the entire county, not excepting even those in the by then rapidly growing nearby city of La Crosse. As a contemporary newspaper article had it:

> Oehler Brothers, in Mormon Cooley [sic], have in course of construction a large stone three story flouring mill, just what has been needed there the past year. These gentlemen built a saw mill five years ago near the same site, and in a year after had a small grist mill running, but it proved insufficient for the large grain growing country around. But these energetic men were alive to the interests of the place and therefore have nearly completed one of the largest and most magnificent flouring mills in this section.[29]

Valentine and Gottfried Oehler originally owned their new mill jointly and events of the next decade suggest that the enterprise was a success. For instance, by 1870, Gottfried and Margaretha had five children: Louis F. (1860-1928), Emma (1860-1861); Ida B. (1863-1911); Gustav A. (1866-1920); and Clara B. (1868-1921). Likewise, Valentine and Sophie had four more of their own during the same period besides Edward: F. Albert. (1860-1893); F. William (1863-??); Lena A. (1865-1952); and Alexander Edwin (1869-1872). Where these two families lived during this period is not certain but it is probable that by 1870 there was at least one house on the 40 acres that Valentine had purchased in 1855. Whatever the truth may be, by 1870, Gottfried was probably ready to build a house of his own and, with four children aged ten and under, he probably needed one as well. Consequently, in that year he purchased 28.5 acres from Valentine, this being the land on the north side of the creek where the mill is located, and in 1873 he bought another half-acre from Valentine.[30]

---

[28] Hirshheimer, H. J. Op. Cit.
[29] "New Mill." *La Crosse Tri-Weekly Democrat.* May 26, 1862, p. 1.
[30] Godden, Laura M. Laura M. Godden is the great-great-great-grand-daughter of Gottfried Oehler and she is the creator of the outstanding Oehler Mill website, from which this and much of the other information that is contained in this nomination was taken. See: <http://www.oehlermill.org>

Valentine Oehler still retained 10.25 acres of land on the south side of the creek opposite the mill; he also owned additional land in the adjoining northeast quarter of Section 27 according to a map of La Crosse county published in 1874.[31] Two years later, Valentine, who by that time was 55 years old, sold his share of the mill to his brother, Gottfried, and turned to farming instead. In the same year, a large root cellar (Map No. 8) was carved by hand out of the natural rock face of the bluff that is located across the road (CTH MM) from the new house (Map No. 5) that Valentine was to build just a few years later.

It appears that it was Gottfried Oehler who first built a new house on the now divided portions of the 40 acres of land in Section 26. This was a two-story frame construction house that was built sometime between 1873 and 1883, but this house was destroyed by fire on May 11, 1883.[32] Undaunted, Oehler rebuilt his house, out of brick this time, and this Italianate style house is still extant today (Map No. 2). About the same time or just one or two years earlier, Valentine Oehler also built a new Italianate style brick house of his own (Map No. 5) on his portion of the land, and this house is also still extant. Both of the brothers' new houses were almost certainly built of brick supplied by the new Mormon Coulee Brickyards that had been established in 1881 about a mile to the northwest of the complex.

One of the unique features of the Oehler Mill Complex by this time was the pleasure grounds that the brothers established around the dam and cave site across the road from the mill.[33] The cave on the property and its beautiful setting was already a well known local attraction by the mid-1880s and the attractiveness of the scene was further enhanced by the large mill pond behind the dam and by Mormon Creek itself which meandered through the site. Because farmers bringing wheat to the mill to be ground frequently stayed at the site until their flour was ready, the presence of this attraction 600-feet away from the mill meant that a farmer could bring his family along and spend a day picnicking and enjoying the site while his flour was being made. In addition, as old roads in the vicinity of the mill were improved and new ones created, the cave site also became increasingly popular with groups coming up from the city of La Crosse, located just five miles away. An early example of this was printed in the June 20, 1888 issue of the *La Crosse Tribune.*

> The annual German Methodist Camp meeting for La Crosse district opened today near Oehler's mill in Mormon coulee, with delegates present from Tomah, Portage, Baraboo, Sauk Center, Galesville, Trempealeau, Arcadia, and La Crosse.[34]

---

[31] Map of the County of La Crosse, Wisconsin. La Crosse: Henry I. Bliss, Civil Engineer/Surveyor, 1874.
[32] "Dwelling Burned." *La Crosse Republican-Leader.* May 12, 1883, p. 1.
[33] The location of the pleasure grounds is outside of the nominated boundaries. Features associated with the pleasure grounds have been lost over time and the land has passed to other owners.
[34] "Thirty Years Ago Today." *La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press.* June 20, 1918, p. 3.

In the years that followed, numerous mentions of similar events can be found in all of the La Crosse newspapers and events continued to be held at the cave site until the 1990s, long after the land had passed out of the Oehler family's ownership.

Valentine Oehler continued to live in his house for several years but eventually moved to the nearby community of Shelby, where he died on January 5, 1891. His obituary gave additional information about the later period of his life.

> For nineteen years he [Valentine] was a half owner of a flouring mill in Mormon Cooley [sic]. He finally sold his interest to his brother, Gottfried Oehler, who was his partner, and went into farming. Some time ago he sold his farm and retired from active life to a pleasant home in Shelby. He was Assessor for many years and also Treasurer of his town. Here in La Crosse he was well known and was a member of a La Crosse Lodge of Odd Fellows and also a member of a Masonic Lodge. The deceased leaves a wife and three children, one of the sons, Mr. Albert Oehler, being a prosperous boot and shoe dealer in this city. The other sons are Edward Oehler, of Milwaukee, and William Oehler, of Pullman, Illinois. Lena Oehler is the youngest of the children and lives at her home in Shelby.[35]

Valentine Oehler was buried in the Oehler family cemetery, which is located on the east side of CTH MM just north of the Gottfried Oehler house.[36] Four years later, on October 4, 1895, Gottfried Oehler died and he too was buried in the family cemetery.[37] Valentine's heirs had no interest in running the mill so it was Gottfried's heirs who took over the running of it and the ownership of the land in Mormon Coulee. The principal heir was Gottfried's oldest son, Louis Oehler, who had been working at the mill with his father since at least 1880, when he was 22.[38]

By 1895, Louis Oehler was 35 and the Oehler Mill's Red Rose Flour brand was a well regarded local product and the mill continued to produce flour for another twenty years under the direction of Oehler family members. There was also now considerable competition in this area. In 1881, the Oehler Mill was one of 17 water-powered mills in the La Crosse County area, fifteen being flour and grist mills,

---

[35] "One More Passes Away." *La Crosse Daily Republican and Leader*. January 6, 1891, p. 4. Obituary of Valentine Oehler.
[36] This cemetery is still intact today and it contains numerous grave stones of Oehler family members.
[37] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit.
[38] The U. S. Census of 1880 shows Louis Oehler as working in the flour mill.

including the Oehler Mill, one being a feed and saw mill, and another being a saw mill.[39] Three of these mills were located on Mormon Coulee, the southernmost one being the Oehler Mill, while the next one to the north and upstream was the Blumer or Bloomer Mill, which had been built by Matthias Blumer prior to 1878, had three run of stone, and was located in what is now the unincorporated community of Shelby.[40] Located just a little further to the northeast and still further upstream was the Center Valley Mill, which in 1878 had four run of stone. In January 1880, this mill was taken over by two brothers, M. H. and Charles S. McKown, and it is no longer extant.

Despite competition from nearby mills and the presence of much larger merchant flour mills in the nearby city of La Crosse, Gottfried Oehler's family remained committed to milling. Louis Oehler was not the only son of Gottfried Oehler to make a career out of milling. Besides Louis and Gustav Oehler there were also two younger brothers: Fred G. Oehler (1872-1924), and John F. Oehler (1876-1948), and it is believed that all four of the brothers worked in the Mormon Coulee mill during the years after Gottfried's death. During this same period they also improved the pleasure grounds across from the mill. For instance in 1907, they built a sizable one-story-tall wood frame enclosed picnic pavilion across the creek from the cave for the use of picnic parties.[41]

In 1910, John Oehler purchased the Rushford flour mill, which is located about 20 miles due east of La Crosse in Rushford, Minnesota. He operated this mill with help from both Fred Oehler, who moved to Rushford at the same time, and from Gustav, who moved to Rushford in 1918.

Louis, in the meantime, had bought a share in the Chaseburg Roller Mills in 1913 in partnership with George Hosmer, a Mormon Coulee neighbor. This mill was located on the Coon River in Chaseburg, Wisconsin, which is situated in Vernon County just eight miles southeast of the Mormon Coulee mill, and it had been conducted by the Graf Brothers prior to the sale. Louis Oehler moved to Chaseburg with his wife and family in October 21, 1913, and he continued to be involved in the operation and ownership of this mill, which he later enlarged and electrified.[42] This left Gustav in charge of the running of the Mormon Coulee mill, which he did until 1918, when the mill was closed. Gustav then moved to Rushford to work with his brothers there and it was there that he died in 1920.[43] Two years

[39] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit. The Oehler Mill website has a listing of these mills and it also contains historic information on many of them as well.
[40] Ibid. This mill was destroyed by fire in 1900.
[41] "Build Picnic House." *La Crosse Tribune*. September 16, 1907, p. 5. This building is no longer extant.
[42] "Chaseburg, Wis." *La Crosse Tribune*. October 21, 1913, p. 8. See also: *La Crosse Tribune*. October 9, 1916, p. 8.
[43] "Gust F. Oehler." *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*. January 30, 1920, p. 6. Obituary of Gustav Oehler.

later, Fred Oehler also died in Rushford and this left John Oehler to operate the Rushford mill.[44] Louis Oehler, meanwhile, continued to operate the Chaseburg mill, but in 1922, bad financial decisions that he made resulted in the Oehler family losing the Mormon Coulee mill.

> According to family memory, Louis Oehler lost the mill because of his efforts to help a struggling friend with a mill in Minnesota. Louis put up his mill as collateral and ended up losing the mill, while his friend in Minnesota somehow managed to keep his. It is also believed that Louis may have been taken advantage of by the banker due to his poor English abilities. Louis' son Elmer Oehler (a 1918 graduate of La Crosse High School and about 23 years old in 1922) attempted to help his father with the business deal, but memory says Louis was too proud to accept his son's help.[45]

Later in 1922, Joseph Jahnel purchased the Valentine Oehler house and its 10.25 acres and it remained in the possession of the Jahnel family until 2010. Louis Oehler died in 1927, and in 1930, the Gottfried Oehler house, along with the mill, the pleasure grounds, and the Oehler Cave, were all purchased by Wenzel Herlitzka for $1950.00 and this event brought an end to the Oehler family's part in the history of the Oehler Mill Complex. Herlitzka, in turn, sold the property to his daughter, Anna, and his son-in-law, Norbert Betz, in 1936 for $526.00, and in 1950, Anna Betz sold the property to Robert and Lucille Swing.

Robert Swing (1915-1994) later became a sales manager with the Northern States Power Co. in La Crosse and he also engaged in farming on his Mormon Coulee land. During Swing's lifetime he and his wife also reopened the former Oehler pleasure grounds to the public, which once again became a popular local recreation spot and a popular place for group picnics in the summer months.

> Under the ownership of Robert Swing, the Oehler Mill hosted many gatherings reminiscent of past times, when the farmers would enjoy the park and cave while their grain was turned into flour. Church groups, businesses, and social clubs were among the park goers. Some specific groups included the Coulee Region Barber Shoppers, the Muzzle Loaders, and Heileman's [brewery]. According to Robert Swing in a 1992 interview for the La Crosse Tribune the park would host "20 picnics a summer on weekends" and "several thousand people" would visit the mill each year.[46]

---

[44] "Fred Oehler Found Dead in His Bed in Home at Rushford." *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*. July 18, 1922, p. 5. Obituary of Fred Oehler.
[45] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit. "Louis Oehler dies, June 1928 (son of Gottfried Oehler)."
[46] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit. "Picnics, 1950s."

In 1990, one of the Swing's six children, Jeanne Swing Pavela, and her husband, Dr. Stephen L. Pavela, purchased a part of the land that her parents owned and they built a modern house across the road on the bluff top overlooking the Oehler Cave. Robert Swing's deteriorating health brought an end to the public usage of the pleasure grounds and he died in 1994. It had been the hope of both Mr. and Mrs. Swing, however, that in the future the land they loved so much could be used for "something special" and in 1999 this dream came true. In that year the Swing family donated 70 acres of their land, which lay to the east of the Pavelas' home site, to the Roman Catholic Diocese of La Crosse to be used as the site of a $25,000,000 shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Construction on the shrine began in 2001, and the Shrine's excellent Romanesque Revival style church was finally completed and dedicated on July 31, 2008, with Mrs. Swing and her family in attendance.

Mrs. Lucille Swing continues to occupy the Gottfried Oehler house today. In 2010, one of the six daughters of Jeanne and Stephen Pavela, Dr. Jennifer Pavela Althoff, and her husband, Nicholas Althoff, purchased the Valentine Oehler house and the surrounding land from the Jahnel heirs, with the intention of restoring it and making it a home for themselves and their children. As a result, both of the Oehler family houses and the Oehler mill are now once again owned by a single family and four generations of the Swing family will soon be living in Mormon Coulee.

Architecture

It is believed that the Oehler Mill Complex is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion C, Architecture, for its local significance because the stone and brick flour mill that lies at the heart of the complex is now a very early, very rare, and largely intact example of the rural flour mill resource type. In the nineteenth century, mills of this type were a common sight on rivers and streams in the southern half of Wisconsin, but few examples have survived into the present day. The vast majority of these are located in the state's cities, villages, and unincorporated communities, where they were typically the earliest industries. Truly rural examples of this resource type are now very rare and the mill built on Mormon Creek by the Oehler brothers in 1862 is now one of the most impressive of the few surviving examples of this highly important resource type that have been identified. In addition, the significance of the complex is strengthened by the presence of the two fine Italianate style houses that were built just to the north and south of the mill in the early 1880s by Valentine Oehler and Gottfried Oehler, the two brothers who built and successfully operated the mill.

One of the earliest applications of the use of waterpower in Wisconsin was to operate the state's early flour and grist mills, these being two of the earliest industries in Wisconsin to achieve economic importance. The history of Wisconsin's flour and grist milling industry and its associated technology is detailed at length in the Milling Study Unit of the CRMP's Industry Theme section and still more in-

depth information can be found in Jerry Apps fine book, *Mills of Wisconsin and the Midwest,* published in 1980. Therefore, this history will not be repeated here except as it amplifies the history of the Oehler Mill and its La Crosse County peers.

The importance of flour and grist milling as an early local and statewide industry can hardly be overstated.

> As a result of the region's early emphasis on wheat farming, flour mills in Wisconsin were of immediate and vital importance. In the days of poor transportation and scattered development, each village needed a flour mill, and by the 1840s and the 1850s, small wind or water-powered mills were scattered across the settled portions of the state. While only 29 grist mills were located in the state in 1840, by 1850 the number had reached 117 and 392 workers were employed to produce over $3,536,000 worth of flour and milled grain in Wisconsin. By 1860, the number of mills exceeded 370. … The location of a mill was often the key to development of a commercial village center, the mill acting as an early hub for trade and business, as well as a meeting place for the exchange of news. Many of Wisconsin's early communities developed around the pioneer local mill. The majority of the early mills were relatively crude or simple in design. Mostly of wood construction, they often utilized heavy timber framing to support the excessive weight of the grind stones that were the heart of the milling process.[47]

The earliest flour and grist mills in rural La Crosse County were all water powered and they were built in the 1850s. The first was the Lloyd L. Lewis Mill, which was located on Fleming Creek in Section 14 of the Town of Farmington; it was built in 1850 as a grist mill and was then converted to a flouring mill soon thereafter. Other early pioneer rural mills included: Palmer's Mill, built in 1851 on the La Crosse River near West Salem, WI; the Dutch Creek Mill in Bangor, WI, built in 1855; the Burnham Mills in Bangor, built in 1858; the Barre Mill located in Barre Mills, WI, built in 1858; the Big Creek Mill, located in the Town of Burns, which was started as a sawmill in 1855 and was converted to a flour mill in 1865; Harker's Mill in Bostwick Valley, built in 1853 and enlarged in 1860; and the first Oehler Mill, which was built as a sawmill in 1857 and was then converted into a flour and grist mill in 1858.[48] These first mills were built wherever a favorable water power site could be found and they were so essential to the settlers of those days that communities quickly evolved around most of them. Most of these communities are still extant today even though the mills themselves have now almost all disappeared.

---

[47] Wyatt, Barbara (ed.) Op. Cit., Vol. 2, pg. 8-2 (Industry).
[48] Butterfield, Consul W. *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin.* Chicago: Western Historical Society, 1881, pp. 318-319.

As the La Crosse region became more settled and as more and more land was converted into farm land, still more rural mills were constructed and a number of already successful ones were either enlarged or were, like the first the Oehler Mill, torn down and rebuilt on a larger scale. Among the mills that were built in La Crosse County in the 1860s were: Lovejoy's Mill on the La Crosse River near Neshonoc, built between 1860 and 1862; the Halfway Creek Mill in Holmen, WI, built in 1866; and the new Oehler brother's flour mill in Mormon Coulee in the Town of Shelby, built in 1862.[49]

With the exception of the Oehler Mill, no photos of any of these other historic mills have yet been found, but there is still good reason to believe that the two-story-tall stone Oehler Mill was the most architecturally impressive of all the county's rural mills when it was built. Whether built of wood or masonry, all water-powered mills of this time shared certain characteristics. Their lowest story housed the mill's machinery and since it was subjected to large mechanical forces it had to be massively built in order to withstand them. Likewise, the upper story (or stories) also had to carry heavy loads and they too were supported by a wood frame composed of typically massive posts and beams. However, using stone for the walls of the upper stories of the mill was something of a luxury since most of the other La Crosse County mills of this type would have been clad in wood boards. True, stone walls would have given the mill some additional protection from the dust explosions that were one of the great hazards of milling in those days and they might have reduced the Oehlers' fire insurance premiums as well, but they were also more in keeping with the Germanic milling heritage of the Oehlers and they were also, perhaps, expressing pride in what they had accomplished.

Within eight years, the Oehlers had acquired their first Mormon Coulee competitor. In 1870, Matthias Blumer built a three-story brick mill containing three run of stone a half-mile upstream in what is now the unincorporated community of Shelby, and by 1881, S. McKown had built a third mill still further upstream just east of Shelby that also had three run of stone.[50]

Not surprisingly, the increased settlement that supported these rural mills also resulted in better transportation systems being created, which in turn facilitated the construction of newer and larger flouring mills.

> At the same time these relatively small mills were popping up across the Midwest, merchant mills were also being built. In the southeastern counties of Wisconsin, particularly in

[49] Hirshheimer, H. J. Op. Cit. p. 41. Of the listed mills, the only one believed to be extant today is the Oehler Mill.
[50] Ibid. Op. Cit. See also: *La Crosse Democrat*. March 22, 1870 for the Blumer Mill. Neither of these other two mills is now extant.

> Milwaukee and Racine, these large mills began to appear. By 1849, Milwaukee boasted five mills, each capable of producing eighty to one hundred barrels of flour a day. Racine had a custom mill in 1837. By 1844 this lake city had a merchant mill with four run-of-stone and a plan to export flour to the east and beyond. By 1850, Racine had six mills.[51]

Merchant mills paid the farmer cash for his grain and the concentration of these mills on the state's eastern edge can be accounted for in part by the wealth of transportation options available, including Lake Michigan itself and also the state's burgeoning railroad systems, which in the 1860s were most densely concentrated in the southeast corner of the state. In the following decade, though, La Crosse began to emerge as the principal milling center on the state's western edge and its position on the Mississippi River and on one of the state's first railroad lines gave it advantages that for a short time, were similar to the ones enjoyed by its eastern cousins.

> La Crosse County had nine flour mills in 1860, producing $101,000 worth of flour and meal. This was less than one-fourth of the total goods manufactured. The city [of La Crosse] did not have a mill of any noticeable size until the middle seventies. Practically all the pioneer flour mills were located on water power sites. There was no water power available in the city, and the limited power capacity of the country mill sites prevented the operation of any large units.[52]

In the 1870s, the advent of steam power permitted the first large merchant mills to be built in La Crosse. The first was the A. A. Freeman Flouring Mill, built in La Crosse in 1875, which had a five-story-tall stone main building, and it and the six story-tall brick William Listman Mill, built in La Crosse in 1879, were the largest mills on the Mississippi River in Wisconsin when they were built.[53]

By 1881, when the first history of La Crosse County was written, there were fifteen flour and feed mills run by water power in the county, with the Oehler mill being one of the fifteen.[54] These mills can be divided into two principal types: rural mills such as the Oehler Mill; and the community mill, which is essentially urban in character and around which a community formed. Sadly, most of the county's nineteenth century mills of both types have now been demolished and are now memorialized mostly by street names in the county's various rural communities such as Mill Street in West Salem; Old Mill Road in Barre Mills, and Bloomer Mill Road and Mill Street in Shelby.

---

[51] Apps, Jerry and Allen J. Strang. *Mills of Wisconsin and the Midwest.* Madison: Tamarack Press, 1980, p. 39.
[52] Hirshheimer, H. J. Op. Cit., p. 38.
[53] Both of these mills are now non-extant.
[54] Butterfield, Consul W. Op. Cit., pp. 318-319.

> In the late 1800s, with the development of new process milling, large merchant roller mills, and improved transportation facilities, the smaller community mills began to close. The smaller mills that had produced flour for their communities with only modest outside commercial sales were forced to expand or quit. Some of the smaller mills did invest in roller equipment and then found that they couldn't make enough money to pay their debts. Some continued with millstones for several years, relying on their good reputations to keep solvent. Some added a few rollers but continued with millstones as well. But many millers transformed their flour mills into feed mills. They sold off their millstones and rollers and bought relatively inexpensive attrition mills (and later, hammer mills) that ground corn, oats, rye, and wheat fine enough for livestock feed but not fine enough for human consumption as flour.[55]

No actual survey of La Crosse County's historic mill sites has yet been undertaken but the electronic inventory of Wisconsin's historic architectural and archaeological resources that is maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society's Division of Historic Preservation and Public History is a reasonable substitute. This database shows that today the only other extant flour mills that are listed in the inventory in La Crosse County other than the Oehler Mill are a frame construction clapboard-clad mill of unknown age that is located at 214 S. Leonard St. in West Salem, WI (AHI #72506), and the asphalt shingle-clad Big Creek Mill that is may be located on Big Creek Road in the Town of Burns (AHI #63375).[56]

Indeed, when one looks deeper into the inventory one finds that almost all of the surviving flouring mills and grist mills are either merchant mills such as the NRHP-listed Cedarburg mill and Concordia mill in Cedarburg, or else are mills around which communities developed such as the NRHP-listed Paoli Mill. Rural mills like the Oehler Mill are by far the rarest mill resource type found in the inventory and intact stone examples are rarer still and should be considered to be both extremely rare and highly endangered.[57]

In addition to the mill itself, the Valentine Oehler and Gottfried Oehler houses are also believed to be contributing resources in the Oehler Mill Complex because they are fine representative examples of the Italianate style residences that were built in Wisconsin's cities between 1850 and 1880. According to the CRMP, typical hallmarks of Italianate style residences in Wisconsin are wide eaves with brackets, low-pitched hipped or gabled roofs, and often a polygonal or square cupola placed on the roof. These buildings are usually either "L" shaped or square in plan, they frequently have smaller ells attached to

[55] Apps, Jerry and Allen J. Strang. Op. Cit. , p. 85.
[56] This last mill may also no longer be extant.
[57] The Montieth Feed Mill on CTH C in Green County (AHI# 89118), a two-story stone mill that appears to be very similar to the Oehler Mill, could not be found and may now have been demolished.

the main block, and they have boxy proportions. Other common characteristics include verandas or loggias, bay windows, and tall windows with hoodmolds or pediments. In addition, Italianate style residences usually have clapboard, ashlar, or brick walls, or less frequently, ones made out of stone.[58] Most of these features are present in the designs of the two brick-clad Oehler family houses, which are fine representative examples of the style.

The Valentine Oehler house is the older of the two houses, having been built ca.1882, and its main block is a fine three-ranked example of the "Simple Hipped Roof" subtype of the Italianate style that was identified by Virginia and Lee McAlester in their important work *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Such houses were described by the McAlesters as follows.

> These are square or rectangular box-shaped houses with hipped roofs that are uninterrupted except, in about half of the surviving examples, by a central cupola (these have been called cube and cupola houses). Façade openings are typically three-ranked, less commonly five-ranked, rarely two or four-ranked. This is the most common subtype, making up about one-third of Italianate houses.[59]

The house's rectilinear plan two-story-tall main block is clad in brick and it is extremely intact and still retains its original two-light over two-panel wood entrance door and its original four-over-four-light double hung wood sash windows, which all have dressed stone sills and shaped, dressed stone window heads. In addition, this block's main east-facing façade retains its original full-width, one-story-tall front porch, which extends across the full width of the main façade of the kitchen wing that is attached to the south-facing side elevation of the main block.[60] This one-and-one-half-story-tall brick-clad kitchen wing, however, was built between 1922 and 1930 in the years soon after the Jahnel family took possession and it replaced the house's original kitchen wing, which by that time had fallen into serious disrepair.

Fortunately, a good early historic photo of this house exists that was taken when its original kitchen wing was still extant and it shows that this wing was also one-and-one-half-stories-tall, it was also rectilinear in plan, and it was about the same size as the wing that replaced it.[61] The original wing, however, had a Front Gable Vernacular Form design, it was clad in vertical board and batten wood siding, its main northeast-facing façade was in the same plane as that of the brick block, and its first

---

[58] Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *Op. Cit.* Vol. 2, p. 2-6 (Architecture).
[59] McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, pp. 211, 216-219.
[60] The porch's supporting posts, however, are not original.
[61] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit. "Photos: Oehler Photos; First Generation of Oehlers (Gottfried and Valentine)."

story was sheltered by the same one-story veranda that still shelters the first story of the brick block. What is remarkable about this wing is that its Front Gable design meant that all the rain water and melting snow that ran off the northwest slope of its roof had to drain against the southeast-facing side elevation of the new brick block first, hardly an ideal state of affairs. Indeed, this situation is so unusual that it suggests that the original kitchen wing may have actually been Valentine Oehler's original house and that when the brick block was built it was simply attached across the northwest-facing side elevation of the earlier building, which was then reconstituted as a kitchen wing. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Jahnels both wanted and needed to demolish and rebuild the wing, which Jahnel family memory recalls as having been "full of rattlesnakes" when it was demolished. Otherwise, Valentine Oehler's house as it stands today is still the same house that existed at the end of the 1920s.

The Gottfried Oehler house, meanwhile, was built ca.1884 and it is a fine three-ranked brick-clad example of the "Centered Gable" subtype of the Italianate style that was identified by Virginia and Lee McAlester in their important work *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Such houses were described by the authors as follows.

> These are houses of both simple and compound plan having a front-facing centered gable. The usually small gable projects from a low-pitched hipped or side-gabled roof. Frequently, the front wall beneath the gable extends forward as a prominent central extension. About 15 percent are of this type.[62]

Gottfried Oehler's house is a somewhat simplified example of the Centered Gable subtype that lacks the forward projection of the wall beneath the gable end and it is essentially square in plan although the left half of its southwest-facing side elevation consists of a projecting two-story-tall ell that gives the house the slightest of L-plan configurations. A single historic photo of the Gottfried Oehler house has been found and it is of poor quality and provides only a partial view of the house, but it shows that the house's current side (and front) porches are later replacements for the originals, as is the current front door, with its associated side and transom lights.[63] In addition, an enclosed exterior staircase was attached to the northwest-facing rear elevation of the house at some later date. Otherwise, the house is still largely intact and it retains its original segmental-arched window openings with their dressed stone sills and shaped, dressed stone heads. In addition, the original bull's-eye windows that are centered in the gable ends on the southeast-facing main façade and the north-east-facing side elevation are also intact.

---

[62] McAlester, Virginia and Lee. Op. Cit., pp. 211, 220-221.
[63] Godden, Laura M. Op. Cit. "Photos: Oehler Photos; Second Generation of Oehlers."

Gottfried Oehler's house is more intact than the house of his older brother, it has a more formal design, and it is also larger, which may be at least partially explained by the fact that Gottfried would have had at least four and possibly five children still at home in 1884 and the extra space was probably welcome.

Both Gottfried and Valentine Oehler's houses were built of red brick supplied by the Mormon Coulee Brick Yard, which had been established less than a mile away in 1881 by Gotthelf and Robert Herold, father and son, on Section 27 of the Town of Shelby, a location that is adjacent to the Section 26 holdings of the Oehler brothers. This brickyard was in operation from 1881 to 1958, it was the largest one in the La Crosse area, and remnants of it can still be seen at the end of Brickyard Lane, which is located just east of the current USH 14/61-STH 35 intersection.[64]

The architectural significance of the two Oehler houses lies not so much in their design, as in the fact that their survival adds greatly to the story of the mill that paid for them both. Surviving rural flour and grist mills such as the Oehler Mill are very rare today, but the additional survival of the two millers' houses that were intimately associated with it enhances our understanding of the overall socio-economic context of the mill. Most Wisconsin mills of this type and period were stand alone industrial buildings that were typically owned and run by persons whose places of residence were separate from the mill itself and, in many cases, were out of earshot and eyesight of the mill as well. The Oehler Mill Complex, however, is more typical of European practice where, especially in older examples, the miller and his family often lodged in quarters that were directly attached to the mill building itself or else were housed in adjacent lodgings.

The Oehler Mill Complex is therefore believed to be locally significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture because it contains a very early and largely intact example of the rural flour mill resource type. In 1881, the La Crosse area had 17 water powered mils of all types and sizes, three of which, including the Oehler Mill, were located on Mormon Creek. Today, the Oehler mill is the only Mormon Creek survivor and it is also by far the most intact example of the three surviving historic flour and grist mills that have been identified in La Crosse County. In addition, the

[64] Rausch, Joan. Mormon Coulee Brick Yard Historic District Determination of Eligibility Form. July 1995. This district was determined eligible for National Register of Historic Places listing by the Division of Historic Preservation in 1995 and a copy of the

DOE is on file in their office in Madison, WI. Both of the Oehler houses are specifically mentioned as being products of this yard in this DOE form.

significance of the mill is further enhanced by the two fine Italianate style houses that were built just to the north and south of it in the early 1880s by Valentine Oehler and Gottfried Oehler, the two brothers who built and successfully operated the mill.

Archeological Potential

The extent of any archeological remains within the Oehler Mill Complex is conjectural at this time. Much of the length of Mormon Coulee was surveyed by the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center in 1994-1995 and the Oehler Mill's site is mentioned in the survey report, but there is no mention of any field work being done on this site at that time.[65] Never-the-less, given that early settlers in the Coulee reported finding a lime kiln and pieces of a millstone along the Mormon Creek banks at or near the Oehler Mill site, which they assumed were associated with the early Mormon settlers of the Coulee, it is possible that some archeological remains may still be extant from this early Euro-American settlement period. In addition, given the presence of the creek, which cuts across the site, it is also possible that remains of pre-European cultures may be located within the boundaries of the site as well. However, no information about any prehistoric remains in this site was found in the course of this research.

[65] Dowiasch, Jean and Constance Arzigian. *The Mormon Coulee Survey.* La Crosse: Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Report of Investigations No. 203, July, 1995.

Major Bibliographical Sources:

Apps, Jerry and Allen J. Strang. *Mills of Wisconsin and the Midwest*. Madison: Tamarack Press, 1980.

Atlas of La Crosse County, Wisconsin. Des Moines, IA: Kenyon Co., 1913.

Butterfield, Consul W. *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin*. Chicago: Western Historical Society, 1881.

Dowiasch, Jean and Constance Arzigian. *The Mormon Coulee Survey*. La Crosse: Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Report of Investigations No. 203, July, 1995.

Faeth, Emily. "Hidden History." La Crosse: *Second Supper (La Crosse's Free Press)*, July 30, 2009.

Godden, Laura M. Laura M. Godden is the great-great-great-grand daughter of Gottfried Oehler and she is the creator of the outstanding Oehler Mill website, from which much of the information that is contained in this nomination was taken. See: <http://www.oehlermill.org>

Hirshheimer, H. J. "Manufacturing in La Crosse, 1853-1880." La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Sketches: Series 4. 1938.

Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild. "Ship Marianne." ISTG Vol. 8. See: http://immigrantships.net/v8/1800v8/marianne18550718.html

Interview with Jeanne Swing Pavela. August 15, 2011.

La Crosse Democrat. Various Issues.

La Crosse Republican-Leader. Various issues.

La Crosse Tribune. Various issues.

La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press. Various Issues.

Major Bibliographical Sources, Continued:

Map of the County of La Crosse, Wisconsin. La Crosse: Henry I. Bliss, Civil Engineer/Surveyor, 1874.

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

Sanford, Albert H. "Mormons of the Coulee." Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin. *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. XXIV, No. 2, December, 1940.

Rauch, Joan. Mormon Coulee Brick Yard Historic District Determination of Eligibility Form. July, 1995.

Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*. Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Oehler Mill Complex is located in the NE quarter of the NW quarter of Section 26, T15N, R7W, of the Town of Shelby in La Crosse County, WI. The boundary line begins at a point located on the westerly ROW of CTH MM that corresponds to the point of intersection of the ROW with the north bank of Mormon Creek. The line then runs north along said westerly ROW for approximately 650-feet, then turns 90° and continues west a distance of 350-feet. The line then turns 90 degrees and continues south in a southerly direction on a line that parallels the westerly ROW of CTH MM at a distance of 350-feet for a distance of 750-feet to a point that is located on the north bank of Mormon Creek. The line then turns east and continues due east across Mormon Creek and continues approximately 400-feet further east to a point that is located on the easterly ROW of CTH MM. The line then turns 45 degrees and continues northeast approximately 450-feet further east until reaching a point that is located on the south bank of Mormon Creek. The line then turns and runs in a west-southwesterly direction along the south bank of Mormon Creek until reaching the westerly ROW of CTH MM. The line then turns 90 degrees and follows said ROW across Mormon Creek north to the POB.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the complex encompass the mill, the residences and the associated agricultural outbuildings and structures that have historically been associated with the Oehler Mill Complex. Other lands (outside of this boundary) previously owned by the Oehler family are considered extraneous for the purposes of this nomination. These lands include all the land on the east side of CTH MM and north of Mormon Creek, which land includes the site of the former Oehler pleasure grounds and its associated picnic pavilion, the Oehler dam site, the Oehler outlet tunnel, and the Oehler cave site. The former pleasure grounds are now occupied by a large modern house that was built by the Pavela family and the pavilion is no longer extant. In addition, the cave, the outlet tunnel, and the ruins of the dam now lie within the boundaries of the land that the Swing/Pavela family donated to the Diocese of La Crosse for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Form 10-900-a
(Expires 5/31/2012)
Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: **Oehler Mill Complex**
City or vicinity: **Town of Shelby**
County: **La Crosse**
State: **Wisconsin**
Photographer: **Timothy F. Heggland**
Location of original digital files: **6391 Hillsandwood Rd., Mazomanie, WI 53560**
Number of photographs: 19

Photo #1
General View, View looking N

Photo #2
Oehler Mill, View looking N

Photo #3
Oehler Mill, View looking SW

Photo #4
Oehler Mill, View looking S

Photo #5
Oehler Mill, View looking NE

Photo #6
Oehler Mill Interior, 1st Story, View looking S

Photo #7
Oehler Mill Interior, 2nd Story, View looking SE

Photo #8
Swing Family Pole Barn, View looking NW

Photo #9
Gottfried Oehler House, View looking NW

Photo #10
Gottfried Oehler House, View looking SW

Photo #11
Gottfried Oehler House, View looking S

Photo #12
Gottfried Oehler House, View Looking NE

Photo #13
Swing Family Barn, View looking N

Photo #14
Valentine Oehler House, View looking SW

Photo #15
Valentine Oehler House, View looking SE

Photo #16
Valentine Oehler House, View looking NE

Photo #17
Jahnel Family Garage, View looking N

Photo #18
Oehler Family Barn, View looking E

Photo #19
Oehler Family Root Cellar, View looking ENE

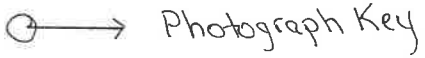
OEHLER MILL COMPLEX

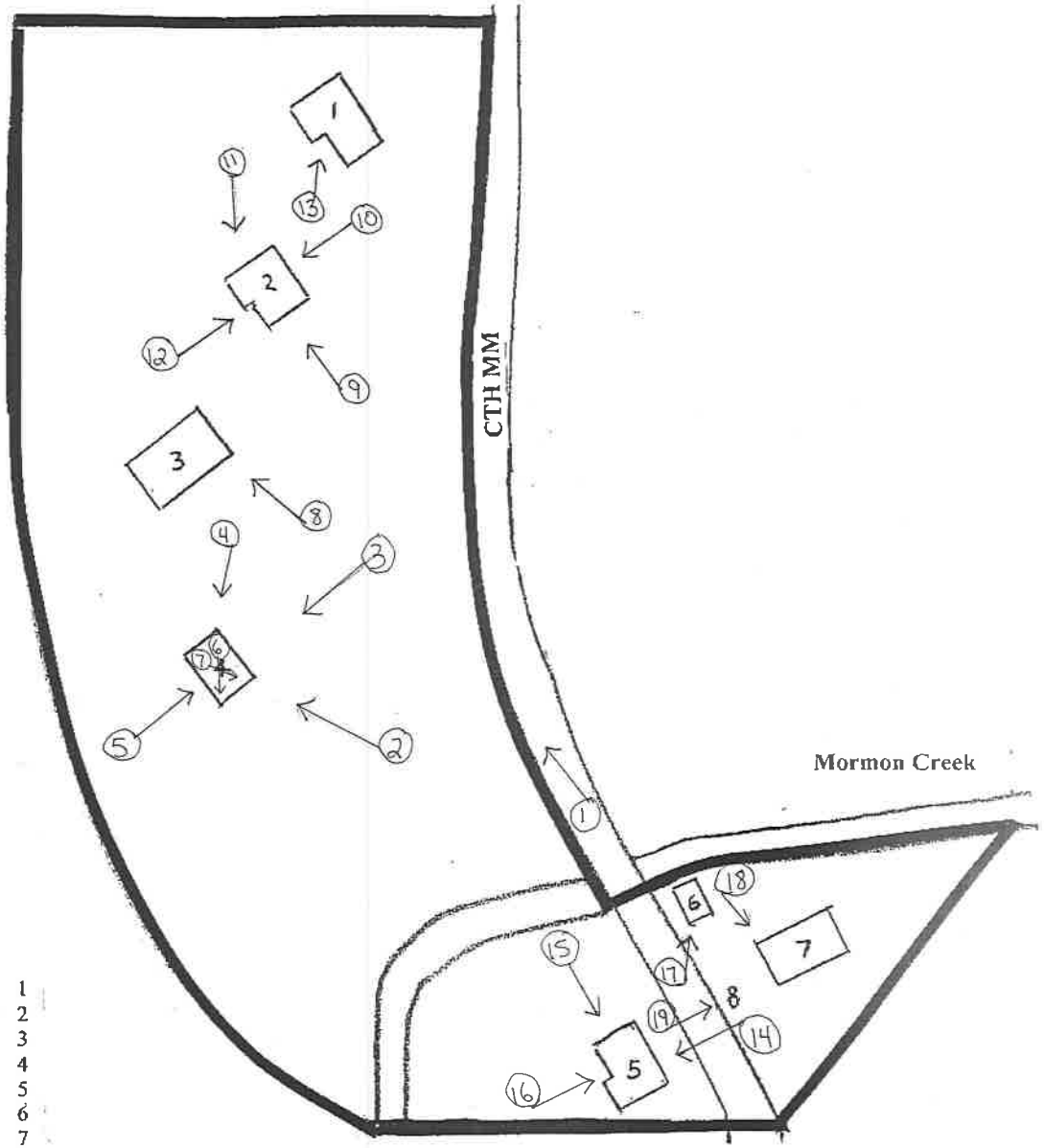
TOWN OF SHELBY, LA CROSSE CO., WI

Not to Scale

Boundary Line

Non-Contributing Resources: Map Numbers 1, 3, 6



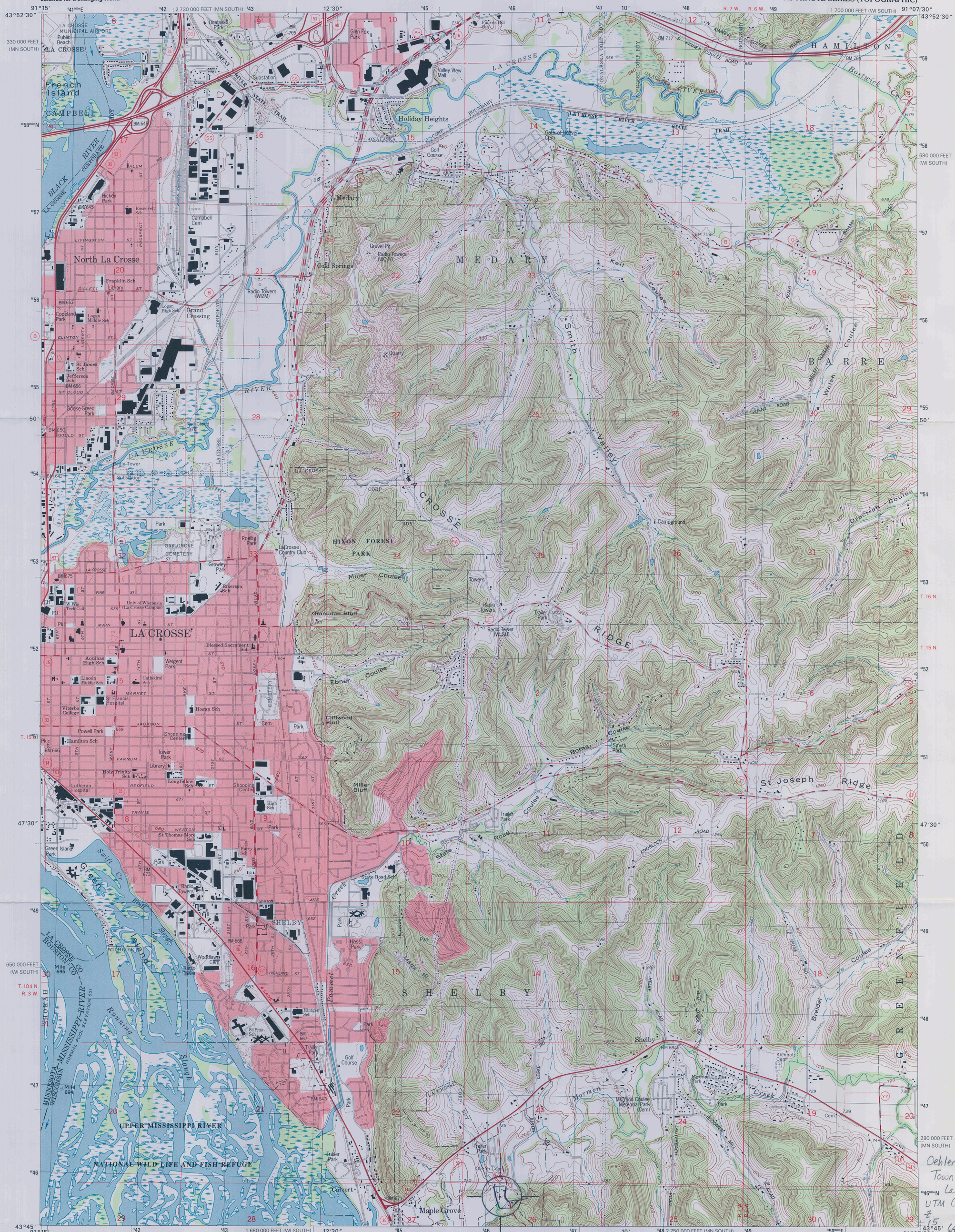


Swing Family Barn	1998	Building	1
Gottfried Oehler House	Ca.1884	Building	2
Swing Family Pole Barn	1988	Building	3
Oehler Flour and Grist Mill	1862	Building	4
Valentine Oehler House	Ca.1882	Building	5
Jahnel Family Garage	post-1923	Building	6
Oehler Family Barn	pre-1907	Building	7
Oehler Family Root Cellar	1876	Structure	8

USGS
science for a changing world

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

LA CROSSE QUADRANGLE
WISCONSIN-MINNESOTA
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Produced by the United States Geological Survey

Derived from imagery taken 1991 and other sources. Photoinspected using imagery taken 1998; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1992
Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 2001

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10 000-foot ticks: Wisconsin coordinate system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 15

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

SCALE 1:24 000

1 0.5 0 KILOMETERS 1 2
1000 0 METERS 1000 2000
1 0.5 0 1 MILES
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10000 FEET

GN
1° 15′ 22 MILS
0° 0 MILS
UTM GRID AND 2001 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

20% TOTAL RECOVERED FIBER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
AND WISCONSIN GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY, MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

WISCONSIN
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3
4		5
6	7	8

1 Holmen
2 Onalaska
3 West Salem
4 La Crescent
5 St Joseph
6 Brownsville
7 Stoddard
8 Coon Valley

ADJOINING 7.5′ QUADRANGLE NAMES

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway hard surface
Secondary highway hard surface
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route

INTERIOR–GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA–2001

LA CROSSE, WI-MN
1998
NIMA 2771 I SW-SERIES V861

ISBN 0-607-96615-7

Oehler Mill Complex
Town of Shelby
La Crosse Co., WI
UTM Coordinates
E E N
15 646150 4845830