

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common

Hoover Boat House

(2) Historic (if applicable)

Bernard Boat House

II. Location

(1) Street Address

622 East Gorham Street

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)

District 4

III. Classification

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

Boat House

(2) Zoning District

C

(3) Present Use

Boathouse, boating lessons

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

(1) Name(s)

City of Madison

(2) Street Address

Parks Department

(3) Telephone Number

266-4711

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

(1) Parcel Number

0709-133-1201-6

(2) Legal Description

Block 260, parts of lots 5 & 4

VI. Condition of Property

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

Good foundation, some repairs needed

(2) Altered or Unaltered?

Relatively unaltered

(3) Moved or Original Site?

(4) Wall Construction

Cement foundation and wooden walls

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

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

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

There have been three structures on the site, however, little is known about the original structure. It was an "L" shaped building. In 1911 the original building was removed and a replacement structure was erected. But in 1915, the new building burnt. The Hoover Boathouse that stands today was constructed immediately after the fire and is dated 1915.

The structure is one and a half stories, with the boat storage area in the basement. The basement is composed of one large open space and two smaller sections. One section used to be an office, and the other is the beginning of a classroom. There is a private apartment upstairs.

The Hoover Boathouse is in good condition. The cement foundation is in good shape, but some of the wooden walls need repair or replacement. There are usable docks, piers, and a sidewalk leading from the street to the rear of the boathouse. It is a well painted red building with white trim. The light green roof appears to need some new shingling.

A set of doors on the boathouse was originally from the third state Capitol building. One door bears scars from the fire that destroyed the Capitol.

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

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner George Bernard	(2) Original Use Boathouse
(3) Architect or Builder Unknown	(4) Architectural Style Frame
(5) Date of Construction 1915	(6) Indigenous Materials Used None distinctive

(7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words.

VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used

1. "Bernard Action Sunday to end Mendota Boat Era", Capital Times, Volume 92, No. 122, 11/1/63, Green Sheet, p.5.
2. Biographical Review of Dane County, WI, Chicago, Biographical Review Publishing Co, 1893, pp. 456-7.
3. "Have you seen this in Madison?", WI State Journal, Vol. 214, No. 76, April 26, 1970, Sec. 1, p. 4
4. Madison City Directories for the years 1866, 1871-2, 1877-8, 1880-1, 1883-4, 1885-97, 1902, 1904, 1909, 1911, 1914, 1916, 1917, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935, 1937, 1939, 1941, 1943, 1946, 1947, 1950, 1951-67, 1971
5. Real Estate Officer, City of Madison
6. Sanborn-Perris Maps, Sanborn-Perris Map Co, LTD, for Madison, 1898, 1902, 1908, 1934, 1942

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) Name and Title Jill M. Corcoran	
(2) Organization Represented (if any) Self	
(3) Address 909 S. Brook St, #8	(4) Telephone Number 255-4076
(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared August 4, 1976	

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

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

Originally known as the Bernard Boathouse, the Hoover Boathouse represents a significant part of Madison's history as a boating community located on an isthmus between two large lakes. It is an important link to a time when the residents of the city were more dependent upon the lakes for travel and when the recreational use of the lakes was more consciously oriented to large pleasure-boat operations. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, operations such as the Bernard business were also significant tourist attractions in a city that relied on that trade.

Charles Bernard, Sr. was one of Madison's early settlers, coming here from New York City in 1851. After years of military service, Bernard wished to better his position in life and become a farmer. However, a "friend" who was to buy the land for Mr. Bernard left town with the seed and land acquisition money. Bernard then relied on tailoring for his livelihood. Finally he saved enough money to begin boat building, a trade he learned while working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

In 1853, he initiated his Madison boat building business. There is some discrepancy as to whether the location of his business was at 624 East Gorham (now 622) or closer to Wisconsin Avenue. His residence was not 624 (622) East Gorham until 1883. It is conceivable that the house at 622 East Gorham was built for or by him, but perhaps not completed until 1883, and that his business could have been located there as early as 1853 on the site of the present day Hoover Boathouse.

The German-born American built his own steamers, Anne and the Columbia, practically by himself. The other Bernard passenger boats were the Wisconsin¹, Forward, the Badger, Mendota, and the Little Wisconsin. Charles Bernard, Sr. died in 1907 and his son William took over the business.

As business grew and changes came, a Bernard's Pleasure Park came into existence. Also known as Woodward's Grove, the park was located a half mile east of Mendota State Hospital. The Bernard boats carried people across the water to a beautiful dance pavilion. The pavilion was moved in 1943 and made into an administration building on the hospital grounds.

William Bernard designed the Madison-style ice boat. He built three, named Princess I, Princess II, and Princess III. William's son, Carl, won the Hearst Trophy, the Stuart Trophy and the Class A Northwestern cup. In 1928 he won the National Championship for Midwest Outboard motorboat racing. He used an old motor which he and his father had fixed for the race.

By 1940 the automobile had cut down the boating business. People no longer relied heavily on boats to travel in this city of four lakes. Carl was still able to use his skills in managing the University of Wisconsin Boathouse. William Bernard sold the boathouse, boats and docks to Berg's Sporting Company in 1940. William's retirement was cut short by death in 1943, the same year Berg's Sporting Co. sold the property to Harry B. Hoover.

¹The Columbia was rebuilt by William Bernard into the Wisconsin.

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Hoover continued the business until 1963 when he auctioned much of the equipment. He owned the boathouse until December of 1968 when the City of Madison bought it. Presently, the Hoover Boathouse is used by the Mendota sailing school. At least part of the tradition which the Bernard family started in 1853 continues today.