

**CITY OF OSHKOSH LANDMARKS COMMISSION**  
**LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF 226 HIGH AVENUE**

**MARCH 27, 2006**

**Introduction**

Pursuant to 30-76 (F) (1) (c) of the Oshkosh Municipal Code, Shirley Mattox, on behalf of the City of Oshkosh Landmarks Commission and with the consent of the property owner, has submitted a nomination for Landmark Designation of the Italianate single family home located at 226 High Avenue. The property is being nominated under the following eligibility criteria specified in the Code:

- The property is identified with historic persons or with important events in national, state or local history.
- The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

**Property Description**



c. 1867



2006

The nominated structure is a two story Italianate single family home. According to the 1980 Intensive Historic Resource Survey, this structure constructed c. 1868 and originally occupied by the Ebenezer James family. Supporting documentation provided with the application indicates the date of construction would be c. 1866. The Survey states:

“The James House is significant as an example of the Italianate style, as employed in Oshkosh. This type of design was apparently very popular during the second half of the nineteenth century, and was constructed in both wood and masonry. Many of these homes have been drastically altered, this building retains its original fabric. The James House consists of a main cubical block, two stories in height with three window units at each level. The main entrance is located to the west of the façade and sheltered by a one story porch. The porch extends across the east elevation, connecting to the rear wing, a gable roofed block. Frame brackets mark the porch and eaves, a frame belvedere completes the design. The main alteration to the façade has been the replacement of original windows.”

The property remains in relatively good condition, with the majority of the original distinguishing design elements and ornamentation shown in an early photograph remaining. Missing elements include one chimney and a railing around the porch roof. The Survey indicates the windows have been replaced, while the application states that only the storm windows have been replaced, the primary sash is original. According to the Intensive Survey, the property was eligible for the National Register in 1980, and it appears nothing would have changed that status.



According to Sanborn Maps, the surrounding area originally contained more residential uses. Today, the area is primarily commercial, with few residential uses remaining. The property, and the surrounding area are zoned C-3 Central Commercial District.

## Evaluation of Architectural Significance

The Italianate residential style is characterized by low-pitched roofs, overhanging eaves supported by ornate brackets and tall windows. These structures may also have a cupola or belvedere. Most commonly, Italianate homes are two stories. The style has been said to have dominated American homebuilding between 1850 and 1880 and was promoted in pattern books published by Andrew Jackson Downing, among others. Italianate structures were constructed in both wood and brick.

According to the 1980 Intensive Survey:

“Italianate designs in Oshkosh are of two types: the compact, symmetrical form and a more picturesque asymmetrically massed form. Regardless of the basic outline, proportions tend to emphasize verticality and mass. Carved brackets and well-articulated fenestration are common to both types.

The earliest example of the compact symmetrical form is the c. 1856 Bowen house at 1010 Bayshore (OS 6/11). Broad gable roofs rise over each elevation of this building. A belvedere enhances the composition, as do brackets along the eaves. Later examples dating from the 1860’s and 1870’s, such as the Ripley house at 545 Algoma Boulevard (OS 12/2), and a residence at 226 High Avenue (OS 10/36), are constructed of brick and include frame belvederes and fine details. Brick work on corner pilasters and window arches on a former residence at 1113 Oregon (OS 3/2) is noteworthy.”

Despite the reported popularity of the Italianate style in the mid to late nineteenth century, there are only five known standing two story brick Italianate structures in Oshkosh. The following discussion addresses the condition and design of the four other structures.

### 809 Ceape

This property is listed on the National Register of Historic places due to its association with Mr. Banderob, a former Oshkosh Mayor and a significant person in the early Socialist movement in the State of Wisconsin. It was the opinion of the State Historical Society that the property was not eligible for the National Register on the basis of its architecture.



This structure is less elaborate than 226 High and the original front porch was replaced by a colonial revival style porch probably in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The east and south facades are marred by fire exits resulting from the conversion of the property to a triplex. While the property was rehabilitated in the past 10 years or so, and as a result, is in better condition than prior to the rehabilitation, the fact remains that it has been modified and due to the more restrained brackets and lack of cupola, it is not as good an example of Italianate architecture as 226 High.

### 1113 Oregon

This property is not listed on the National Register and is not eligible according to the 1980 Intensive Survey. This was originally a single family home constructed between 1878 and 1884. It has been converted to a mixed use building with office space on the first floor and rental units on the second. The original windows have been replaced and the original window openings now are partially filled by siding.



Modifications have been made to the porch and railings. While the brackets are nice, and there is good detail on the pilasters at the building corners, there is no cupola and overall, the building is not as representative of Italianate architecture as 226 High.

### 143 Church

This home is a more restrained example of the Italianate style, although the brackets are quite elaborate. There is a twentieth century enclosed front porch and a first floor addition on the south east. Windows have been replaced and there is no cupola. While the property was identified in the 1980 Survey, there is no date of construction and the Survey listed the property as not eligible for the National Register and there is no indication that status has changed.



The property has recently been converted back to single family use from a Community Based Residential facility.

### 545 Algoma

According to the 1980 Intensive Survey, this property was constructed c. 1872, was designed by architect William Bell and may be the only standing example of his early work in the City. The building was constructed for Sylvanus Ripley, a partner in a lumbering concern and by his family well into the twentieth century. Niles Behnke, the noted local watercolorist also lived here.



While the porch was modified in the early twentieth century, the balance of the property remains apparently intact and is an outstanding example of well articulated Italianate architecture. The Survey indicated it was eligible for the National Register and while the property is not listed at this point, it is the opinion of State Historical Society staff that the property is still eligible.

In comparison with its peers, 226 High appears to be significant due to the quality of the original design and the fact that few changes have been made to the exterior of the structure.

### **Property History**

According to the 1980 Intensive Historic Survey:

“Ebenezer James was a local industrialist. In the 1860’s he formed the firm of James and Stille which manufactured lathe and other woodworking products. In 1891 he is listed as a partner in Pitcher and James, a similar firm and in 1893, a manufacturer of pumps. He died in 1912.”

Interestingly, the well designed and preserved Greek Revival home across the street at 217 High Avenue was constructed c. 1863 by August Stille, the early partner of Ebenezer James according to the Survey.

According to supporting information provided with the nomination, Ebenezer James, and his wife Mary Fletcher James had six daughters and one son. Three daughters never married and lived out their lives in this home. Mrs. James died at 47 and, according to her obituary, was very involved in charitable activities. According to an article in an Oshkosh Public Museum newsletter “... Oshkosh women were led in the struggle (for suffrage) by a retired high school teacher named Sarah James.” Sarah James was one of the three daughters who remained in the home until her death.



S. James, 1911

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the information available, it appears that the Italianate home at 226 High Avenue embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style as required for Landmark designation under the Ordinance. Staff recommends approval of Landmark status for this property.

While the James family appears to have been quite prominent, the most important family member, and lifelong resident of the home is arguably Sarah James due to her commitment to ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment and apparent leadership in the local suffrage movement. Based on the statements of Public Museum staff, Commission staff recommends that the property also eligible for Landmark status on the basis of being identified with a person important in local, state and national events as specified in the Ordinance.

The property at 226 High may receive Landmark status under one or both of these categories.