

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common  
"Hocheera"

(2) Historic (if applicable)  
Home of John R. Commons

II. Location

(1) Street Address  
1645 Norman Way

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)  
Nineteenth

III. Classification

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

(2) Zoning District R-1 and R-4  
~~According to City Assessor's Office, R-1~~  
~~According to Building Department, R-1~~

(3) Present Use  
Residential

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

(1) Name(s)  
Richard R. and Doris B. Dubielzig

(2) Street Address  
1645 Norman Way

(3) Telephone Number  
233-0676

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

(1) Parcel Number  
0709-183-1408-3

(2) Legal Description  
Over

VI. Condition of Property

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

(2) Altered or Unaltered?  
Altered

(3) Moved or Original Site?  
Original Site

(4) Wall Construction  
Frame and stucco

(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:

Hocheera, the home built by John R. and Nell Commons in 1913<sup>1</sup>, survives on a 30,061 square foot lot. That parcel is roughly a tenth of the 6.87 acres of farmland purchased in Block One of Dale Heights by the Commons in 1909 and 1910.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of the original purchase has been subdivided and other residences have been built on it.

Hocheera is a spacious two story raised bungalow in the Prairie School style. The 2,700 square foot home was built on a hilltop back from Lake Mendota. The first story is constructed of stuccoed wood frame and the second story is sided with wooden shingles. The house has a wide projecting roof and wide eaves with exposed rafter ends, and dormer windows in the second story. A second gable covers the kitchen on the NW side of the house. A chalet style balcony off the original master bedroom provides a SE view of Madison. Windows in pentagonal-shaped openings in the 40 foot long enclosed porch on the NE side of the house give the occupants a view toward Lake Mendota.<sup>3</sup>, facing p. 184 A front pergola at the SW entrance was removed by subsequent owners and the massive central brick chimney was stuccoed over.<sup>4</sup> A one car garage attached to the foundation below the kitchen on the NW side of the house during 1937-47<sup>4</sup> does not add to the character of the building. The badly deteriorated front door was replaced in 1983 by the present owners. The three panes of glass, hardware and hinges from the original door were incorporated into the new wooden door fashioned in the same style as the old.

Most of the windows in the home are double hung with 6 panes in the top halves only. At each end of the 40 foot long living-dining room is a large rectangular window with 6 square panes of glass in a horizontal row above it and a double hung window on either side. A large rectangular window topped with a horizontal row of 12 square panes of glass is in the NE wall of the living room overlooking the enclosed porch. A pair of French doors leads from the living room to the enclosed perch.

The original plan of the first floor is presented with a copy of a part of a letter from Anne Polisar, Commons' granddaughter, who lived in the house from 1928 - 36<sup>5</sup> (encl 1) The first floor includes a kitchen (13 X 14), study (14 X 21), 2 entry hallways, lavatory, coatroom, and enclosed porch (40 X 9). The study in which John R. Commons wrote has the original unaltered floor-to-ceiling oak shelves and cabinets, oak floor, and fireplace.

A copy of a photograph in the Iconographic Collection of the State Historical Society and also published in Commons' autobiography Myself (1934)<sup>3</sup>, facing p. 196 shows Commons with a group of his "Friday Niters" at the SE end of the living room. (encl 2) The false beams in the ceiling, the wainscoting, and the small window on the NE (porch) wall<sup>4,6</sup> were all removed by the Burkhardts during their ownership of the house, 1937 - 47<sup>6</sup>. The projecting cupboards described by Anne Polisar, which separated the dining area from the living room, were also removed by the Burkhardts so that the combined living-dining room now measures 16 X 40 feet.

The doors to the front hallway and kitchen from the main room shown in Anne Polisar's sketch were removed by the owners from 1980 - 83, John and Martha Lippitt, who constructed a large open archway in that area.<sup>7</sup>

The living room fireplace was plastered over by the Burkhardts (1937 - 47)<sup>4</sup>. The

Description, continued

plaster was removed by the Lippitts (1980 - 83). They covered damage to the bricks with molding and a mantel fashioned from the oak doors and they put a woodburning insert into the living room fireplace.<sup>7</sup>

The kitchen and lavatory are altered from the original floor plan and much of the woodwork throughout the house has been painted. Exposed oak floors in the living-dining room and study were refinished by the Lippitts (1980 - 83) as were the maple floors in the kitchen and second floor hall and bedrooms.<sup>7</sup> The second floor includes 4 bedrooms, 2 large linen closets, 1 walk-through closet, and a full bathroom. The present master bedroom, on the NE side of the house, was apparently created from 2 smaller rooms.

The basement contains a lavatory and a room which was once John R. Commons' garage.<sup>5</sup> It was at some later time panelled and a fireplace was installed. The room is presently rented to a roomer.

Description references:

1. Commons family photo album, pages provided by John R. Commons' granddaughter, Anne Polisar. Pages were photographed by R. and D. Dubielzig and by the State Historical Society, December, 1983.
2. Warranty Deeds numbers 297403 and 307100. Office of Register of Deeds. City County Office Building, Madison.
3. Commons, John R. 1964 edition. Myself. UW Press, Madison.
4. Photographs provided by Frederick Burkhardt, owner of the house 1937 - 47, and copied by R. and D. Dubielzig, December, 1983.
5. Letter from Anne Polisar to Doris Dubielzig, November 22, 1983.
6. Letter from Fred Burkhardt to Doris Dubielzig, November 27, 1983.
7. Personal communication, John and Martha Lippitt to Doris Dubielzig, December 10, 1983.

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

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner

John R. and Ella Downey Commons

(2) Original Use

residence

(3) Architect or Builder

Cora Tuttle<sup>8, 9</sup>

(4) Architectural Style

Prairie

(5) Date of Construction

1913

(6) Indigenous Materials Used

none

(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

Numbering is consecutive to references under Description.

1. 8. Shockley, R.J. 1978. The California bungalow and its influence in Madison. Journal of Historic Madison, Inc. of Wisconsin, p. 9.
2. 9. Letter from R.J. Shockley to Doris Dubielzig, March 14, 1984. (Enclosure 3)
3. 10. "Passes away on Friday at Raleigh, N.C." Madison Capital Times, May 12, 1945. In Wisconsin Necrology, v. 52, pp. 13-14. State Historical Society of Wis.
4. 11. Perlman, Selig. 1950. Biographical sketch of John R. Commons. In The economics of collective action, by John R. Commons, ed. by Kenneth H. Parsons. The Macmillan Co., New York. pp. 1 - 7.
5. 12. Boulding, Kenneth E. 1957. Institutional economics. American Economic Review 47: 7.
6. 13. Briggs, Hazel F. Recollections in the John R. Commons Collection. Archives of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
7. 14. Parsons, Kenneth H., ed. 1950. Preface. In The economics of collective action, by John R. Commons. The Macmillan Co., New York. pp. v - x.
- 8.

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) Name and Title

Doris B. Dubielzig

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

(3) Address

1645 Norman Way

(4) Telephone Number

233-0676

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

May 7, 1984

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

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

"Hocheera", a Winnebago Indian word meaning "Welcome", was the name given by Mr. and Mrs. John R. Commons to the house they built west of Madison in 1913.<sup>5</sup> The house is significant because of its association with John R. Commons, nationally known for his progressive economic theories, and because it probably represents the largest residence designed by the amateur architect Cora Tuttle.

"The most dangerous man in Wisconsin" as a leading employer in the state called him,<sup>3</sup>, p. 170 was born October 13, 1863 in Hollandsburg, Ohio.<sup>10</sup> Commons was brought to the University of Wisconsin by economics Professor Richard Ely in 1904 to prepare the Documentary History of American Industrial Society, published in 11 volumes 1909 - 11, as well as to teach. He remained with the University for 30 years.<sup>11</sup> His move to Wisconsin thrust him into the conflict of economic interest, stimulated his most productive work and the above accusation. "Yet what I was always trying to do in my academic way," explained Commons in his autobiography (1934), "was to save Wisconsin and the nation from politics, socialism, or anarchism, in dealing with the momentous conflict of 'capital and labor'."<sup>3</sup>, p. 170

A prolific writer and an indefatigable worker, Commons was an amazingly complex man. In 1934 he wrote:

I feel myself a failure in my own home. Why should I parade? Here I sit with only one child left out of six. My oldest served in the War, with honors for bravery from the English and Russian governments, but disappeared from my home in 1930, under a persecution mania. Four died in infancy. My wife, who for thirty years saved me from blunders or got me out of them, and who read and corrected all my manuscripts, has been gone six years. My sickness from childhood has often knocked me out of my work and sent me wandering over the earth looking for something new. These culminated in this collapse, which began in 1930, and now I cannot travel any more but must sit at my window reading detective stories and looking out on beautiful Lake Mendota and distant hills, which, in their continuous change every hour of the day, are my substitute for travel. Then, too, I have saved no money, and in these distressing times, with my relatives in need of help more serious than my own, I worry about that mortgage which apparently is greater than my home will sell for. (3, p. 3)

Ten major works published by this "failure" during his residence at Hocheera

Significance, continued

are listed in Enclosure 4. Commons' protégé Selig Perlman wrote of his mentor, "an enumeration of the fields in economics in which he did original work reads like the table of contents of a comprehensive textbook."<sup>11</sup> Professor Kenneth Boulding summarized Commons' achievements: As a

braintruster for LaFollette's Progressive Movement, he succeeded in getting government regulation of utilities, and labor and social legislation that made Wisconsin the model for other states.... Through his students Commons was the intellectual origin of the New Deal, of labor legislation, of social security, of the whole movement in this country towards a welfare state. (12)

Hazel Briggs Rice was Commons' secretary from 1922 - 28. In her recollections of Mr. Commons, which are included in the Archives of the State Historical Society, she described Commons' work habits. Commons would rise daily at 4 a.m., come down to his study at Hocheera, write pages in longhand, and appear at the University later in the morning with her day's typing assignment.<sup>13</sup>

Selig Perlman recalled the meetings of what were known as the "Friday Nites" at Hocheera:

There are hundreds of Commons' students, including some most prominent in the academic life and in the public services of this country, who largely owe their careers to the untiring and tender encouragement by Professor and Mrs. Commons. At the Commons' weekly 'Friday Nights' at their home near Mendota Beach, students, frequently numbering as many as sixty, had the opportunity of meeting some of the most prominent economists and public men of the world and to present before the group their own observation in the 'field.' To the Commons' 'Friday Nights' many a public man looks back today as the informal and friendly 'Parliament' that heard his 'maiden speech'. (11)

Following his retirement from the University, Commons sold his home in 1937 and moved to Florida with his niece. There he lived in a small house trailer. In the spring of 1945 he traveled to North Carolina with his son where he joined his one surviving sister until his death on May 11.<sup>14</sup>

Copies of letters recently written by Professor Robert Ozanne and Archivist Harold Miller confirm the enduring significance of Commons' work. (Enclosures 5, 6) R.J. Shockley's 1978 article on Cora Tuttle describes the influence of her bungalow designs in Madison.<sup>8</sup>