

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common

William T. Stephens house

(2) Historic (if applicable)

Old Spring Tavern

II. Location

(1) Street Address

3706 Nakoma Road

(2) Ward

20th

III. Classification

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

Building - private residence

(2) Zoning District

*E-2*

(3) Present Use

Home

IV. Current Owner of Property

(1) Name(s)

William T. & Florence G. Stephens

(2) Street Address

3706 Nakoma Road

(3) Telephone Number

233-2964

V. Legal Description

(1) Parcel Number

0709-283-2014-5

(2) Legal Description

Plat of replat "A" of 1,2&11 Nakoma

VI. Condition of Property

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

Excellent

(2) Altered or Unaltered?

Altered - porch added

(3) Moved or Original Site?

) Original

(4) Wall Construction

Three layers of brick - 22" thick.

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

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

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

The brick for the Old Spring Tavern was made by its builder, Charles Morgan, from clay on the back slope of the property. Morgan had learned brick-making in his native New Haven, Connecticut, and he made the kiln and forms himself. Dr. William Morgan, his son, reported in a letter that the "brick was made from an excellent and durable clay .....it was exceedingly hard, free from potash salts, and were the first to be made in Madison or its near vicinity, all of the brick in town having to be hauled by rail over the old Milwaukee & Prairie du Chien road from Milwaukee." The brick is exceedingly handsome and mellow, ranging in color from pink through light orange, much brick in Madison being made from cream-colored clay. The walls are three layers of brick on the first floor, 22" thick, and two layers on the second floor.

All beams in the house are solid oak, held together with square nails, and the boards in the roof also are oak. Mrs. Stephens speculates that Morgan may have used up the oaks on the property to make the beams for the house, since the property has no oaks at this time, in an area noted for many oaks.

The large house contains no ridgepole in the roof. There is a cyclone door in the attic. Many panes of glass in the windows are the original ones, and much of the hardware. The windows on the west side of the house are not symmetrically placed. The heavy front door is the original, as is the solid walnut newel post & staircase. Built on the side of the hill, the basement has three doors opening onto ground level. The house had no fireplaces when it was built, since it was the period of Franklin stoves.

When Professor Dickson acquired the house, he did the following restoration and remodelling: he installed a complete heating system, plumbing and wiring and built two fireplaces - one in the living room and another in the former tavern area downstairs. The basement fireplace contains bricks from a milkhouse built near the spring. Dickson also replaced the worn pine floors with hardwood, and installed electric lamps resembling the old kerosene lamps once used in the inn. He added a two-story Chippendale porch to the front of the house overlooking the spring. The summer kitchen was converted into a garage, and a stone wall built around the front and sides of the property. The Dicksons furnished the inn with antiques from Monroe and other towns along the old territorial road. A window on the west side was added to the kitchen, and another lengthened to door-size entering the upper deck.

The Stephens family has maintained the earlier restorations and remodelled the kitchen, added period wallpaper and furnished the house with period antiques.

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**VII. Significance**

(1) Original Owner

Charles C. Morgan

(2) Original Use

Stagecoach Inn & Tavern

(3) Architect or Builder

Charles Morgan & James W. Gorham

(4) Architectural Style

Greek Revival

(5) Date of Construction

1854

(6) Indigenous Materials Used

Brick from the site

(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. "Some Dane County Taverns", S.W. Wisconsin, Old Crawford Co., 1932
2. Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory, Rexford Newcomb Dean of Architecture, University of Illinois
3. Historical Society of Wisconsin, see pages of form.
4. Letter from Dr. William E. Morgan, son of builder.
5. Recollections of David Philumilee in 1940, who rode the stagecoach as a child with his father.
6. Letter from Mrs. James (Leah) Dickson, December, 1971.
7. Letter from Mrs. Walter Shar, November 1971.
8. Sundry newspaper articles, Wisconsin State Journal & Capital Times, Milwaukee Journal

**IX. Form Prepared By:**

(1) Name and Title

Jill Marx, Landmark Commission

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

Taychopera Foundation, Inc.

(3) Address

1212 Gilbert Rd.

(4) Telephone Number

271-0108

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

2/7/72

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Spring Tavern is a two-story abstracted Greek Revival house built with indigenous reddish-pink brick. The original entry now faces to the rear of the house, and the original door and door framing still is in place. The house is set on the side of a hill, leaving the basement exposed on the southeast side with three openings. In plan the house is a simple rectangle with end chimneys, and the roof is a simple gable with returned eaves in the Greek Revival manner. The original appearance of the house is largely reflected in its current appearance, with the exception of a two-story wood porch which was added in the 1920's. In terms of siting, the old roadway originally passed along the northwest side of the house, now the rear yard area, and the present road to the southeast was built later.

The walls at the first-floor level of the house are twenty-two inches thick, having been built with three layers of brick. Above, the walls were continued in two layers of brick thickness. All posts and beams, and the roof planking, are solid oak. No ridgepole was used in framing the roof.

Substantial interior remodeling was done in the 1920's when two fireplaces were added (there were none originally, only Franklin stoves.) The original pine floors then were replaced with new ones of hardwood. The summer kitchen on the northeast side of the house was converted to a garage, and the aforementioned porch was added.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**B. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1854**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: The Old Spring Tavern is significant both for its history and its architecture. Charles C. Morgan built the house in 1854 with brick made from clay found on a nearby slope. Morgan was a businessman who, in partnership with capitalist James W. Gorham, judged the site to be a perfect stopping place on the old Madison-Monroe stagecoach road which led to southwestern Wisconsin's lead mining area. The site's major asset was a large spring behind the house (in its original siting) which served to water horses and oxen. In 1860 Morgan sold the inn and sixty acres to Gorham for \$9,000 in gold, and it became known as "Gorham's Hotel." Soon thereafter, Gorham joined the Union cause in the Civil War and leased the inn. After the war he returned and continued "Gorham's Hotel" until 1895, when he closed the business and used the building as a private residence. Originally, the old stage road passed to the northwest of the house in what is now its rear yard, and the current Nakoma Road was built later between the house and the spring, which is now a duck pond draining into Lake Wingra.

In 1925 the house was sold by the Gorham family to Prof. James G. Dickson, who undertook major interior remodeling and added a two-story Chippendale porch on what is now the front facade of the house. The Dickson family also built a stone wall on the property along Nakoma Road. Mrs. Dickson recently recalled that this wall was designed by and built under the supervision of Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1929 the John Bell Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed on the wall a plaque which reads, "Old Spring Tavern. Stage Coach Station On Road To Early Lead Mines. Home of Gorham Family 1860-1922. Built 1854."

Architecturally, the house is an excellent local example of the Greek Revival style, examples of which are very rare in the City of Madison. Its pinkish brick also is rare locally, most masonry houses in Madison having been built with buff sandstone or cream-colored brick.

On March 20, 1972, the Old Spring Tavern was designated a landmark by the City of Madison Landmarks Commission.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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

It is a tribute to the architectural importance of the Old Spring Tavern that it is featured in Rexford Newcomb's book, Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory, as a prime example of a Greek Revival Inn in Wisconsin.

The tavern, or Gorham's Hotel, was built in 1854 by Charles E. Morgan, a prominent businessman. In a partnership venture with James W. Gorham, (who supplied capital for brick-making equipment & contributed meals for overnight guests), Morgan judged the property to be a perfect stopping-place between the lead-mining district of SW Wis, and the growing capitol, Madison. Its supreme asset was a great spring across the road, (now a duck pond) to water horses and oxen. Indians must have thought the spring a place of particular significance, because six prehistoric mounds were found on the property, each containing a skeleton & artifacts, including copper knives. The artifacts went to the State Historical collection in the first capitol building, & perished in its fire. In historic times the Winnebagos had a village on the ridge behind the tavern, and a trail ran through the woods on the slope of the hill.

In 1860 Morgan sold the inn & 60 surrounding acres to Gorham for \$9000 in gold. Soon afterward, Gorham leased the inn & left Wisconsin to serve the Union Army in the First Regiment of the Berdan Sharp Shooters. He returned later & maintained "Gorhams Hotel" until 1895, when the services of the inn were discontinued & the Gorham family took up residence in it until 1922. The inn was a rendezvous of mail carriers & stage drivers on the pioneer Madison-Monroe Rd., one of 18 territorial mail routes laid out when Madison was made territorial capitol in 1836. This road passed in what now is the back of the house, that being the original front. Although the tavern register has been lost, it is claimed that at least three presidents stopped there while travelling. Governors & legislators drove out to the inn for oyster suppers, and soldiers from Camp Randall attended dances there. Later university students had parties there. Mrs. Philip La Follette recalled that her husband & Senator Robert La Follette had stopped at the Spring Tavern many times when they hauled loads of wheat from Primrose to Madison to sample "Grandma" Gorham's coffee & pastries.

In 1925 the Old Spring Tavern was purchased from the Gorham family by Professor James G. Dickson, an internationally-known plant pathologist. The Dickson family did major restoration to the interior of the house & on the exterior added the Chippendale porch on the front and the stone wall around the front & sides of the house. In a letter to Mrs. Stephens, Mrs. Dickson stated, "Frank Lloyd Wright & his stone mason built the stone wall around the place, Frank Lloyd as boss, I can still see him with his old brown leather britches, giving his ideas & council, Dr. D. always listened to him too." The wall is certainly recognizeable as Wright's design with its strong horizontal stress & projection of random stones. On completion of the restoration, the John Bell chapter of the DAR marked the house with a plaque placed on the stone wall in 1929.

The Dickson family sold the house to the William T. Stephens family in 1939, & they reside in it today. They have continued restoration, put period wallpapers on the walls, landscaped it tastefully & furnished it with antiques. During World War II Mrs. Stephens maintained a Red Cross workroom in her home, creating more than 2000 garments for soldiers in 7000 hours of work.