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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common	(2) Historic (if applicable)
Keenan House	Napoleon Bonapart Van Slyke House

II. Location

(1) Street Address	(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)
28 E. Gilman St.	4th

III. Classification

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

(2) Zoning District	(3) Present Use
	apartments

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

(1) Name(s)
Miss Cornelia Derr

(2) Street Address	(3) Telephone Number
28 E. Gilman	255-1898

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

(1) Parcel Number	(2) Legal Description

VI. Condition of Property

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

(2) Altered or Unaltered?	(3) Moved or Original Site?
Interior altered	Original

(4) Wall Construction
Milwaukee pressed brick 3 feet thick

(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:

The Keenan House, located at 28 E. Gilman St., was built in 1858, the same year as the Pierce House directly across the street. It is the second house out of four to be considered for nomination, and is part of the early aristorcatic area once known as "Big Bug Hill."

The Keenan House was originally built for a bank president and pioneer resident of Madison, Napoleon Bonaparte Van Slyke. He originally came to Madison from New York State for speculative financial reasons. Although he had a very modest beginning and lost his father when only nine years old, he rose to a well respected and wealthy status. He came to Madison in the spring of 1853 and organized the Dane County Bank in 1854. He served as president of the bank until 1859. Also, Mr. Van Slyke was a member of the first city council and helped organize various things needed in the city. For example, he helped section out Forest Hill Cemetary, purchase the city's first fire engine, etc. Between 1857 and 1858 he built three homes in Madison, all listed in the booklet, Sandstone and Buffalo Robes.

For many years he was a regent of the University of Wisconsin and served as president of the Wisconsin Banker's Association.

Although Van Slyke had the house built for him, he never lived in it because his wife died before it was completed. James Robbins was the first person to live in it; he operated a floor mill on the Yahara River.

The original house was two stories high with a brick railing around the second floor and corner stone posts or pillars. Large arched double windows face E. Gilman St., and single arched windows are located on the sides. The windows on the balconey door are stained red. A cupolar is perched on top of the roof which is approximately 8x8x8. Orginally there was access to the cupola, but the opening was walled up during remodeling. Black wrought iron grill work encircles the roof which is tiled in black; the top of the roof is tin. The front porch has column bannisters and the walls throughout are three feet thick. Most of the rooms have 12 feet high ceilings. The first person to alter the house was Chauncey Williams who added the French Mansard roof in 1870.

An advertisement for the Keenan House in the Wis. State Journal dated August 2, 1881 states: "For sale--Milwaukee pressed brick house, three stories high, 17 rooms besides laundry, cellar and storage room. Gas, water and furnace. Also good sewage. (This went into the lake). The house originally cost $35,000 to build."

It was then purchased by Col. John Knight who not only was a life long friend of Sen. William Vilas, but also his law partner and neighbor. Sen. Vilas's home located next door was demolished in 1963 for the insurance company.

After Col. Knight Magnus Swenson bought the house and then in 1900 Dr. Keenan moved in. In 1916 the house was used for sororities and fraternities. It was converted into apartments some time ago.

Col. Knight bought the house for $14,000.

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner	(2) Original Use
Napoleon B. Van Slyke	private residence
(3) Architect or Builder	(4) Architectural Style
probably Kutzbock and Donnel	
(5) Date of Construction	(6) Indigenous Materials Used
1858	Milw. pressed brick

(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. Dean and Custer, Sandstone and Buffalo Robes, 1969.
2. History of Dane County, 1906.
3. Wis. State Journal, Alexius Baas column, 12-11-47.
4. August Kutzbock notebook, located in State Historical Society
5. Student paper on Keenan House by Lynn Van Ellis.
6.
7.
8.

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) Name and Title
Lois Stoler

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

(3) Address	(4) Telephone Number
1129 Frisch Rd.	271-2548

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared
May 3, 1971

City of Madison Landmarks Commission

LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

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

Although the interior of the Keenan House has been remodeled into 16 apartments (apparently this is the fate of the large old homes of the 1850's, it is an important structure historically because it has been in the city since 1858. Not only was it built for a bank president, a President of the United States slept in the House (Grover Cleveland). He and his bride honeymooned in Madison.

The house is built of Milwaukee pressed brick which was widely used and very popular in those days; buildings in cities as far away as Brookly, New York used the brick which had a yellow color to it. However, it soiled very easily so became unpopular.

Although it is unclear who the architect was for this house, in the opinion of this researcher it is highly probably that the homes on all four corners were built by the architectural firm of August Kutzbock and Samuel Hunter Donnel. It is definite that the Pierce House at 424 N. Pinckney St. was designed by this early firm and since they were the only architects in Madison in the 1850's and early 1860's it seems likely that a client with means would chose them for advice and design. Also, Kutzbock and Donnel built the other two Van Slyke houses so it is probably that they built this too.

The Keenan House is important to recognize as an historic and architectural landmark because it helps maintain the integrity of the four corners; thus in recognizing the uniqueness of this area we gain insight into the style of life of a by-gone era that will never be seen again.