

William T. Bonniwell House,
Near Thiensville, Wisconsin.

Ozaukee Co

HABS No. 28-7.

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Photographs,
Written Historical and Descriptive Data.
District No. 28.

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASUREMENT DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey.
Alexander C. Guth, District Officer.
1249 N. Franklin Place, Milwaukee, Wis.

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WILLIAM T. BONNIWELL HOUSE
Wauwatosa Avenue
Near Thiensville, Ozaukee County
Wisconsin

Owner: Not given.

Date of Erection: 1830 's.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Ruins.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Wood.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

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WILLIAM T. BONNIWELL HOUSE

The William T. Bonniwell House is located on Wauwatosa Avenue, approximately one mile due west of a line midway between Thiensville and Cedarburg, Wisconsin. The house sets back from the street on ~~a~~ an eminence and looms up majestically.

From a history of Washington and Ozaukee Counties it is learned the first meeting of the county commissioners was held in this structure on November 18, 1840. This means that the house was erected in the late 30's.

The Bonniwell family are direct descendants of a French Huguenot family by the name of de Bonneville who were driven from France. They were a family of cabinet makers, a craft which had been handed down from father to son for generations. The first Bonniwell arrived in this country in 1832 and got as far as the city of Montreal, Canada, where he died of the Asiatic cholera. Though the Bonniwell family were not farmers, they nevertheless took up claims for nearly a thousand acres of land in the vicinity of this house.

Before Wisconsin had been admitted to the union as a state, Washington and Ozaukee Counties were one. No selection had yet been made as which city would be the county seat. The Bonniwell residence was therefore selected for a place for the commissioners to meet and here they transacted the county business until January 1st, 1844. So this was truly the first county seat of these two counties.

The structure is in ruins today. Only a portion of the cornice, one window sash, part of one mantel and ~~and~~ portions of the doorway are still intact. The four walls loom up like a spectre, with tumble-down roof and floors caved in, yet withall the remains have a charm and an interest which were not found in many of the other buildings of the survey. As one architect aptly expressed it, the building "Outplatts" Charles Platt. It has some most unusual features about it which are found in some of the Italian work of this latter architect. Imagine a building situated even today in a back woods district built along the lines of this house. Where is to be found a house with such an unusual base, stone walls plastered on the outside and scored in a masterly fashion. This scoring seems to be in exact scale with the rest of the building. The window treatments are unusual in that the windows are set way to the front of the wall and are surrounded with a 7" wide outside casing. This alone is a feature which has never been run across in this survey. The whole ensemble is then crowned with a pediment* type of classical cornice well proportioned and entirely in keeping with the fine feeling of the rest of the building. The entrance depicts one of the classical type, though the top of same was restored.

As was stated before, the Bonniwells⁷ were a family of cabinet-makers. The work on the inside of the house certainly shows this. Today, after the elements have played their ~~able~~ part, much of the woodwork still stands which shows

*Not true pediment

the master hand. ~~is~~ For example the treatment around the windows bears the closest study. The jambs of these are all splayed and these together with the heads are panelled. The mantle has an air of refinement to it and the proverbial black walnut staircase (little as there is of it today) shows that much thought and care was lavished on it.

This derelict has aroused about as much interest and enthusiasm in the architectural profession here as any structure in the entire survey. The details and the design are so unusual that, all things ~~are~~ taken into consideration, it hardly seems possible that these features were arrived at without the services of an architect.

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Received 1936, H.C.F.

Charles C. Smith
District Officer.