

**Site Inventory Form**  
**State Historical Society of Iowa**  
 (December 1, 1999)

**State Inventory No. 22-00271**  New  Supplemental  
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.) 22-01381  
 Relationship:  Contributing  Noncontributing  
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries  
 National Register Status:(any that apply)  Listed  De-listed  NHL  DOE  
 9-Digit SHPO Review & Compliance Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Non-Extant (enter year) \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Elkader Opera House  
 other names/site number City Hall

**2. Location**

street & number 207 N. Main Street  
 city or town Elkader  vicinity, county Clayton  
 Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name \_\_\_\_\_ Township No. \_\_\_\_\_ Range No. \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter of Quarter \_\_\_\_\_  
 (If Urban) Subdivision Original Town Block(s) 3 Lot(s) 2 and 3

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification [Skip this Section]**

**4. National Park Service Certification [Skip this Section]**

**5. Classification**

Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
	If Non-Eligible Property Enter number of:	If Eligible Property, enter number of: Contributing      Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	— buildings	1 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> district	— sites	— sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site	— structures	— structures
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	— objects	— objects
<input type="checkbox"/> object	— Total	1 Total

**Name of related project report or multiple property study** (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).  
 Title Arch. & Hist. Resources of the Elkader Downtown Historic District MPD Historical Architectural Data Base Number 22-030

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>08D02 Opera House</u>	<u>02A02 Office Building</u>
<u>03A04 Hall of Fraternal organization (Turner hall)</u>	<u>08D02 Opera House</u>
_____	<u>04B City Hall</u>

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)	Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>05G Romanesque Revival</u>	foundation <u>03 Brick; 04 Stone</u>
_____	walls <u>03 Brick</u>
_____	roof <u>15C01 Rubber Membrane</u>
_____	other _____

**Narrative Description** ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" representing your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	A Property is associated with significant events.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history.

County Clayton  
City Elkader

Address 207 N. Main Street

Site Number 22-00271  
District Number 22-01381

**Criteria Considerations**

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B Removed from its original location.
- C A birthplace or grave.
- D A cemetery.
- E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F A commemorative property.
- G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

02 ARCHITECTURE

13 ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

**Significant Dates**

Construction date  
1903  check if circa or estimated date  
Other dates

**Significant Person**

(Complete if National Register Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Architect  
Schick and Roth (LaCrosse, Wisconsin)  
Builder  
Jensen, J.M., contractor; Nex & Willie, brick masons

**Narrative Statement of Significance** ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bibliography  See continuation sheet for citations of the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form

**10. Geographic Data**

**UTM References (OPTIONAL)**

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	_____	_____	2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet for additional UTM references or comments

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Marlys Svendsen, Svendsen Tyler, Inc.

organization City of Elkader

date 7/2011

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telephone 715/469-3300

city or town Sarona

state WI zip code 54870

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION (Submit the following items with the completed form)**

**FOR ALL PROPERTIES**

- Map:** showing the property's location in a town/city or township.
- Site plan:** showing position of buildings and structures on the site in relation to public road(s).
- Photographs:** representative black and white photos. If the photos are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be curator of the negatives or color slides, a photo/catalog sheet needs to be included with the negatives/slides and the following needs to be provided below on this particular inventory site:
 

Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____

- See continuation sheet or attached *photo & slide catalog sheet* for list of photo roll or slide entries.
- Photos/illustrations without negatives are also in this site inventory file.

**FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF PROPERTIES, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING AS WELL**

- Farmstead & District:** (List of structures and buildings, known or estimated year built, and contributing or non-contributing status)
- Barn:**
  - A sketch of the frame/truss configuration in the form of drawing a typical middle bent of the barn.
  - A photograph of the loft showing the frame configuration along one side.
  - A sketch floor plan of the interior space arrangements along with the barn's exterior dimensions in feet.

**State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line**

Concur with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility:  Yes  No  More Research Recommended  
 This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluated by (name/title): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Elkader Opera House	Clayton
Name of Property	County
207 N. Main Street	Elkader
Address	City

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## 7. Description:

This building was designed and built in 1903. The building was not in place on the 1902 Sanborn Map but was in place by the time the 1913 maps for Elkader were published. Historic photos in 1899 and newspaper accounts in 1903 confirm the building date. The design of the building is consistent with designs for other masonry buildings in the downtown of a similar style.

The Elkader Opera House at 207 N. Main Street is a well-preserved example of several architect-designed commercial buildings in the downtown historic district. It was designed by architects Schick and Roth of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The building has a stone foundation and mottled reddish-brown brick walls with the front façade of the Opera House featuring elaborate patternwork. Sections of running bond, American bond, and basket weave bond were used in the walls with outline patterns of header courses and various combinations of projecting or recessed header or stretcher courses, vertical stacks and corbelling used to accomplish the architect-specified designs. One of the building's most important design features was the installation of a group of three semi-circular arched windows in the center bay beneath a larger round arch filled with patterned brick. The result of the well-executed brick patternwork and creative design was a highly decorative facade without the need for more expensive cut-stone or terra cotta tile work. A goal for the project had been prompt completion, and this design strategy proved successful in accomplishing this goal in nine months.

Important interior features include the original 1903 seats reengineered for improved comfort, a ruby glass chandelier, the full horseshoe-shaped balcony, and an olio advertising curtain from 1914 promoting local merchants from the pre-World War 1 period.

In 1949 Opera House closed as a performing arts facility and the following year was remodeled to house two fire trucks in a large double garage on the main level and a public library on the upper level. The lower level was altered with the installation of three 40 foot steel beams so that the support post system could be removed under the auditorium stage. Improvements to the building to return its original character began after the fire station bays were removed in 1970 with the real historic rehabilitation efforts getting underway in the late 1990s directed by the Opera House Renovation Committee.

## 8. Significance:

The Elkader Opera House at 207 N. Main Street is an example of an architect-designed opera house in the downtown historic district. It is individually listed in the National Register eligible under Criteria A and C as an important community entertainment facility and as the work of LaCrosse architects, Schick and Roth. It is a well-executed example of the Romanesque Revival Style, a style that was selected for several of the major buildings erected in the downtown at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building occupies a prominent site along North Main Street and is a contributing resource in the Elkader Downtown Historic District. The district derives significance under both Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the district's commercial buildings are associated with the historic contexts developed for the downtown in the "Architectural and Historical Resources of the Elkader Downtown Historic District" Multiple Property Documentation form covering the years 1846 to 1960. Under Criterion C, the district's

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Romanesque Revival style buildings such as the Opera House are representative of commercial architectural development that took place from the 1890s through the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Elkader Downtown Historic District Background:*

The town of Elkader was laid out in 1846 along the banks of the Turkey River approximately 16 miles upstream from the Turkey River's confluence with the Mississippi River. The town was surveyed and laid out in 1846 with the Original Town Plat filed in June 22, 1846 by Timothy Davis, Chester Sage and John Thompson, friends and business partners, who began operating a sawmill on North Front (Main) Street in 1845 before the town was even platted. By 1849 they had a successful flour mill in operation. The new town was named for Abd el-Kader, an Algerian freedom fighter and world figure who was admired by Davis. The principal building stimulating development in the 1840s and 1850s was the Elkader Mill. After 1860 when the Clayton County voters selected Elkader as the permanent county seat, the downtown saw a variety of merchants set up shops, several hotels open, a number of newspapers begin publication, and small manufacturing concerns get underway in the city center. Elkader numbered 440 residents in 1860.

The new county court house saw its first section completed in 1869 opposite the downtown. New limestone buildings were erected along both North and South Main Street with public halls frequently located on upper floors. During the 1870s and 1880s 2-story brick buildings began replacing frame business houses. A permanent railroad connection was completed by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul RR in 1886 but service remained poor as Elkader was located at the end of a spur rather than along a main line route. A more important transportation improvement during the 1880s was the completion of the Keystone Bridge across the Turkey River in 1880. Its completion prompted a period of economic vitality and community investment. The community was officially incorporated two years later in 1891 and a new waterworks system and city well were completed in 1896. Electricity was rejected by locals until the end of the decade in 1900, however. In the meantime, new churches were built in 1897 for the Congregationalists on the east side of the river and in 1897-1899 for the Catholics on the west side of the river. Coupled with a series of major fires during the 1890s, the downtown saw a period of rebuilding with a new hotel and bank at the entrance to the business district at the turn of the century. The new opera house was completed on North Main Street while other 2 and 3-story brick blocks appeared both north and south of Bridge Street.

By 1900, Elkader's population stood at its peak of 1,321 – an increase of 77 percent during the decade of the 1890s. Development continued in the downtown before and after World War I but at a much slower pace. Floods and fires damaged the Elkader Mill in 1902, 1906 and 1908, but it was nevertheless rebuilt by Schmidt Brothers & Co., retaining a key employer and anchor for Elkader's downtown. The business district began to extend to the west before and after the war with the principal changes seen along West Bridge Street. Here livery stables and wagon shops were replaced by automobile dealerships, implement companies and filling stations. Five stations eventually located along West Bridge with a sixth one block to the south along First Street SW. The national economic depression of the 1930s was coupled by the closing of the Elkader Mill in 1939 following a major fire. Natural disasters after World War I included major floods in 1922, 1947, and 1958 with a tornado destroying section of South Main Street in 1958 as well.

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Despite these natural and human made disasters, Elkader saw steady but modest population growth from 1,223 in 1920 to 1,526 in 1960. The impact of the automobile was seen in traffic patterns, parking patterns, and traffic signs and the introduction of electricity saw several generations of street lighting come and go. The popularity of the opera house waned and the first floor became the municipal fire station while two movie houses came and one stayed in the downtown drawing evening crowds for entertainment and shopping. As many as 130 people resided in downtown flats during this period. A good system of inter and intra-state highways connected Elkader and its downtown to other parts of the state and country in a way that railroads had never served the community. By 1960, downtown Elkader was well-established as one of several geographically dispersed retail centers serving Clayton County. Virtually every storefront was filled with start-up businesses or multi-generational family stores as Elkader's downtown achieved a stable and healthy status for local and countywide residents.

### *Historic Background for 207 N. Main Street:*

The Turner Hall (nonextant) in the 200 block of North Main Street saw more than \$3,500 in improvements in 1901 for upgrading as an opera house. It was already a "paying concern" according to historian Realto E. Price when in February 1903 the frame building was destroyed by fire. The Turners began making plans to rebuild, but just four days after the fire, an opera house company was formed instead to undertake a larger building scheme. \$10,000 was raised from subscriptions or the sale of stock to 139 shareholders and the Turnverein donated the property from the previous building. As a sign of the important farm-to-town link with Elkader and its downtown, \$600 in subscriptions came from rural Clayton County residents for the rebuilding project.

By April 1903, architects Schick and Roth of LaCrosse, Wisconsin completed plans for the three-story Romanesque Revival Style building. It was to be fashioned of pressed brick and seat 300 in the auditorium with two boxes for 200 additional seats. Elkader contractor J.M. Jensen received the \$9,521 general contract and Nex and Willie were responsible for the elaborately patterned and well-executed brick work. Work was "pushed rapidly" according to historian Realto Price, and the Elkader Opera House at 207 North Main Street was completed for a grand opening in just nine months on November 17, 1903.<sup>1</sup> As part of the construction project, the 200 block of North Main Street was re-graded and new walks installed.

Schick and Roth, a partnership of architects Hugo Schick and Andrew Roth, worked out of LaCrosse, Wisconsin between 1901 and 1909. Roth had a private practice in LaCrosse preceding and following their partnership while Schick was in the partnership Stoltze & Schick between 1888 and 1899 before Schick and Roth formed. Schick and Roth were actively designing major commissions in LaCrosse and other Wisconsin communities during their eight-year partnership. These included the Sparta Free Library (1902) in Sparta, Wisconsin; the Park Store (1903) in LaCrosse; McDonald Flats (1904) in LaCrosse; and St. Joseph's Catholic Church (1908) in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. Of note is the fact that the interior stair cases in the Park Store share similarities with the Elkader Opera House while the parapet design of St. Joseph's Catholic Church uses design elements found in the parapet of the Opera House.

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Griffith, "Many great memories involved in the story of the Elkader Opera House," *Clayton County Register*, July 21, 1971 and Katherine Griffith, "Elkader Opera House," Elkader Main Street, ca. 1992 brochure.

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## 9. Major Sources:

*1984 History of Clayton County.* Clayton County Genealogical Society, Elkader, Iowa: Griffith Press, 1984.

Anderson, David C. *Reconnaissance Survey of Elkader Clayton County, Iowa.* Clayton County Historic Preservation Commission and Main Street Elkader, March 1, 1994.

Andreas, A.T. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa.* Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.

Appraisal Records for Elkader Downtown Properties, Clayton County Assessor's Office, 1949 – 1965.

"Bird's Eye View Map, Elkader, Iowa, 1871." Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Doniat and Zastrow.

Elkader Historical Society/Carter House Museum research file for 207 North Main Street; files focusing on downtown Elkader buildings, businesses, civic leaders and related information. Compiled by Marge Costigan and other museum volunteers. Research files contain hundreds of historic photos, newspaper articles, publication transcriptions, property ownership records, and information from interviews. Digital copies of some research files were loaned to Marlys Svendsen, October 2010 and others were made available in March 2011 for duplication.

*Census of State of Iowa* for the years 1856, 1867, 1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, and 1925 as printed by various State Printers.

*Clayton County, Iowa, Memories & Heritage from the Photo Albums of Clayton County.* Elkader, Iowa: The Clayton County Register, 1997.

Downtown Building Survey (73 surveyed buildings) records including survey questionnaires, draft Iowa Site Inventory Forms and digital photographs. Main Street Elkader, 2009.

Downtown Elkader Business Questionnaires completed by property/business owners, 2010.

Downtown Elkader Individual Property Site Maps compiled by Eli Garms, Clayton County GIS, Engineer's Office, Elkader, November 2010.

Elkader Building Survey (62 surveyed buildings). Main Street Elkader, 1994-1996.

Elkader Historic Photograph Collection (digital). Elkader Public Library, Elkader. Digital files loaned to Marlys Svendsen, December 2008.

"Elkader, Iowa 1846-1971, the Past, the Present the Future." 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, *The Clayton County Register*, Elkader, Iowa, July 21, 1971.

Elkader Telephone Directories, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1932, 1933, 1960 and 1966.

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Gottfried, Herbert and Jan Jennings. *American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1985.

Griffith, Katherine. "Elkader Opera House." Elkader, Iowa: Elkader Main Street, ca. 1992.

Insurance Maps for Elkader. New York: The Sanborn Company, 1895, 1902, 1913, 1930, and 1951.

"Keystone Bridge Centennial Edition." *The Clayton County Register*, Elkader, Iowa, July 26, 1989.

Olson, Edward W. *Look What you Started Mr. Davis...Elkader, Iowa: History, Facts and Folklore about Elkader, Iowa U.S.A.*, ca. 2010.

*Plat Book of Clayton County, Iowa*, Minneapolis: Warner & Foote, 1886.

"Plat of Elkader, June 22, 1846." Recorder's Office, Clayton County, Court House, Elkader, Iowa,.

Powell, Harry. "The Elkader Story." unpublished first draft, December 1980; copy available at Elkader Public Library.

Price, Realto E., editor. *History of Clayton County, Iowa from the Earliest historical Times Down to the Present, Volumes I and II*. Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1916.

Property Transfer Records for Blocks 3 – 10 and Fractional Blocks 3-6 in Town of Elkader, Clayton County Auditor's Office and Recorder's Office, Clayton County Court House, Elkader, Iowa.

Shank, Wesley I. *Iowa's Historic Architects: A Biographical Dictionary*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

*Standard Atlas of Clayton County, Iowa*. Chicago: George A. Ogle & Co., 1902.

United States Census, 1850-2010, provided by State Library of Iowa and the City of Elkader.

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**Additional Information:**

Full Legal Description: Original Town of Elkader, LOTS 2 and 3 BLK 3

**Address: 207 North Main**



Map Created By:  
Eli Garms  
Clayton County GIS  
2010

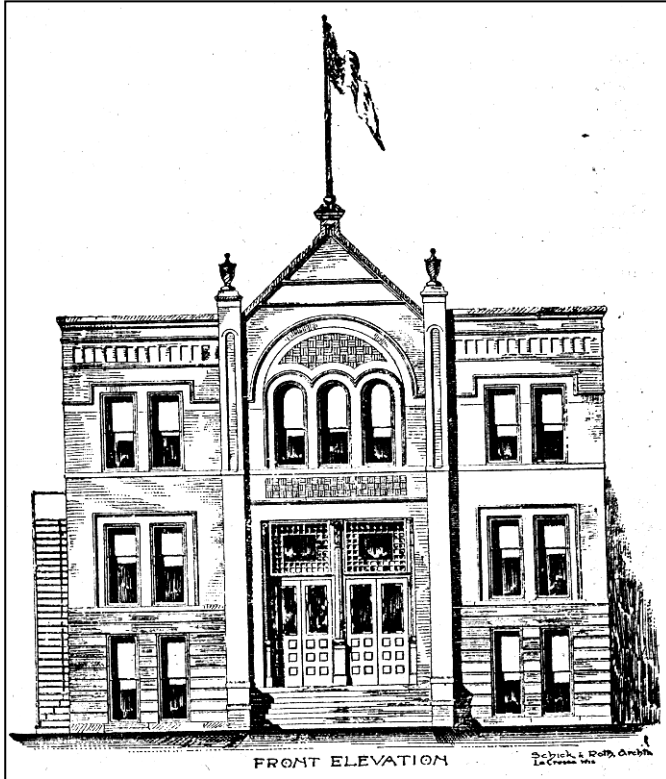
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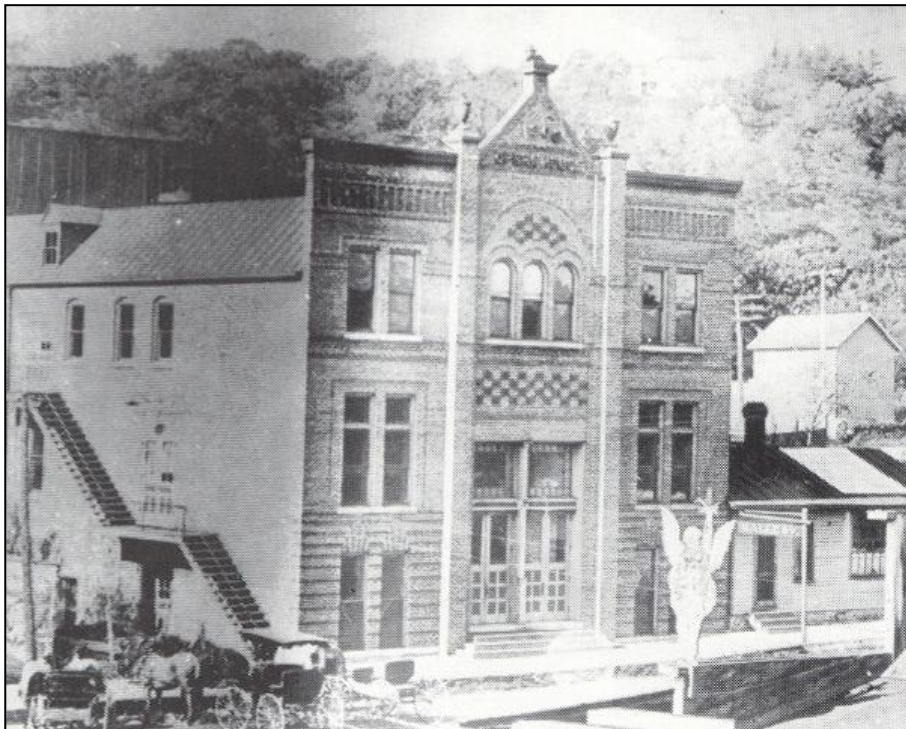
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**Historic Images:** 207 North Main Street, architect's drawing, April 1903 and historic view, ca. 1905 (Katherine Griffith, "Elkader Opera House," Elkader Main Street, undated brochure).



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**Photographs;** 207 N. Main street, looking west and southwest (Elkader Downtown Survey Photograph, 9/16/2010, Marlys Svendsen, photographer)



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**Photographs:** 207 N. Main street, City Hall entrance on south side, looking west and main entrance detail, looking west (Elkader Downtown Survey Photograph, 9/16/2010, Marlys Svendsen, photographer)

