

**201 S Oak Avenue**  
**Architectural Style: Neo-Romanesque**  
**Armory/Oak Street Community Center**

Built in 1941-42, as part of the national WPA project, it was designed as an armory by Marshfield architect Gus A. Krasin. It originally faced "old" Oak Ave to the east. It has Neo-Romanesque characteristics: symmetry in both plan & main elevation: the main entry projects out from the façade & steps up above the roofline; with recessed Roman arches, the center containing the door, each containing a round arched window with a fan patterned top. Identical door canopies are also above the side entries. The Armory represents strength & stability: made of brick; the north & south sides each having 5 engaged piers with curved copings, raising above the roofline, decorated with a bannered shield. Most original windows have been boarded up, some now contain a small window or glass block.



“The interplay of hopeful and alarming news characterized the decade in a variety of ways beyond local and world events. The new armory project fit into this pattern well. As early as 1935, the city sought federal grant money to build a new armory with WPA labor. Mayor George Ives favored the project (evidently one of the few uncontroversial endorsements of his administration) but then left it for the City Council to determine a location. Among the first sites proposed was one-half block off South Central Avenue on Park Street, yet not many favored that locale and the site remained undecided for another three years. These delays threatened more than the new structure. By September, 1938 the state notified Marshfield that the city might lose two guard units due to the currently inadequate armory, but that if a new building were available, Wisconsin would pay \$2000 annually for its use. The City Council speedily adopted a grant proposal whereby the federal government would pay 45% of the total costs for the \$60,000 project with the city picking up the balance. Still, no site was mentioned.



Debates on reducing the project costs continued through 1939 into 1940, finally deciding in December of that year where to put the new structure: the aldermen voted to place it on the old Upham Mill site. And the structure had grown. Not only was it to be a new armory but also a “civic center” to host various public events. The civic center component of the project fell under separate funding from the WPA where the city paid

only 9% of the complete price. Work began in January, 1941 with excavations for the footings for the armory and community buildings going quickly. The News-Herald reported that “ground from the excavation is being used as a fill for the recently drained small mill pond, which, when leveled, will be landscaped and will also serve as a base for the possible extension of West Second Street,” bringing it to an intersection with South Oak.

By the time construction began and the armory was finished, important changes had come to Marshfield. First, economic recovery was more widespread and secure as could be seen in the WPA labor shortages and numerous strikes in town. Landscaping the new high school, digging street and sewer projects took longer as public works projects had to pool workers from around the area to find enough numbers to fill its ranks. Second, the uncertain peace of the Depression had erupted into war in Asia and Europe. War meant good business for somebody and prosperity loomed ahead. The Marshfield Commercial Club passed along a notice to the News-Herald they had received, regarding inquiries for idle industrial plant space. “We would like to have you send us a complete list of all machine shops, manufacturers, and their products in your community using machinery and machine tools. We have various work planned and need manufacturing facilities outside of Chicago.” The newspaper noted that industrial activity had been jammed due to the defense effort. Germany was once again the focus of military activity and prospects that the new armory would serve only ceremonial purposes dimmed with each passing day. Mobilizing for active service became a distinct possibility after 1940.

Excerpted from the Marshfield History Project, Volume 1, “*The Marshfield Story, 1872-1997: Piecing Together Our Past*”, page 61.

Also see additional information on this building from the Wisconsin Historical Society:  
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Property/HI55742>