PRESERVATION
RACINE, INC.

NEWSLETTER
FALL 2014

2014 TOUR OF HISTORIC PLACES

The booklet included with this newsletter describes our 39th Annual Tour of Historic Places to be held on Sunday, September 28. This year's tour is titled *Pleased to Preserve, Proud to Present.* The sites are:

- The Johnson Homestead, 1737 S. Wisconsin Avenue – 1903
- The S.C. Johnson Research Tower, 1525 Howe Street – 1950
- The William and Laura Crane House, 1654 College Avenue – 1902
- The Marshall House, 1703 College Avenue – 1882
- Apartment Residence at The Hugh Gorton Building, 404 Main Street – 1877
- Apartment Residence at The Fratt Building, 426 Main Street – c.1847
- St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 614 Main Street – 1866-1872

Sites can be visited in any order during the tour hours of noon to 5:30 p.m. Guides will be stationed at each site giving pertinent information regarding the architecture and history of the buildings. A special exhibit, *Racine's Wearable Past,* will be on display at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. For more information please refer to the tour booklet. Refreshments will be available at the church.

Tour tickets may be purchased the day of the tour for $17 at the ticket booth located south of the Johnson Homestead property. Advance tickets are $15 and may be purchased prior to the day of the tour at the following locations:

Borzynski's Farm and Floral Market 11600 Washington Avenue, Sturtevant
First Weber Group 1100 North Main Street
Larsen's Bakery 3311 Washington Avenue
Milaeger's 4838 Douglas Avenue or 8717 Hwy 11, Sturtevant
O & H Bakery 1841 Douglas Avenue or 4006 Durand Avenue
Personal Touch Flowers by Julie 5445 Spring Street or 4060 North Main Street
Uncorkt 240 Main Street

The Kid Who Climbed the Tarzan Tree, revisited

Many of us were fortunate enough to have attended the April 7, 2014 membership meeting when we were enthralled by David Rozelle's program on his years at the Taylor Orphan Asylum. On April 21 David composed the following article in which he both expressed his thanks to us and to the Friends of the Racine Public Library for inviting him to speak and also shared his inner most thoughts on the demise of the Children's Home. Obviously those meetings and the follow-up tour hosted by Elmwood Park and Preservation Racine on April 8 were of mutual benefit and satisfaction to all involved. David will be pleased to learn that the Racine County Heritage Museum currently has a Taylor Orphan Asylum exhibit on display near the archives room. Now, on to read David's *Three Days in April*....

Barbara S. Walter

Three Days in April

I apologize, Racine.

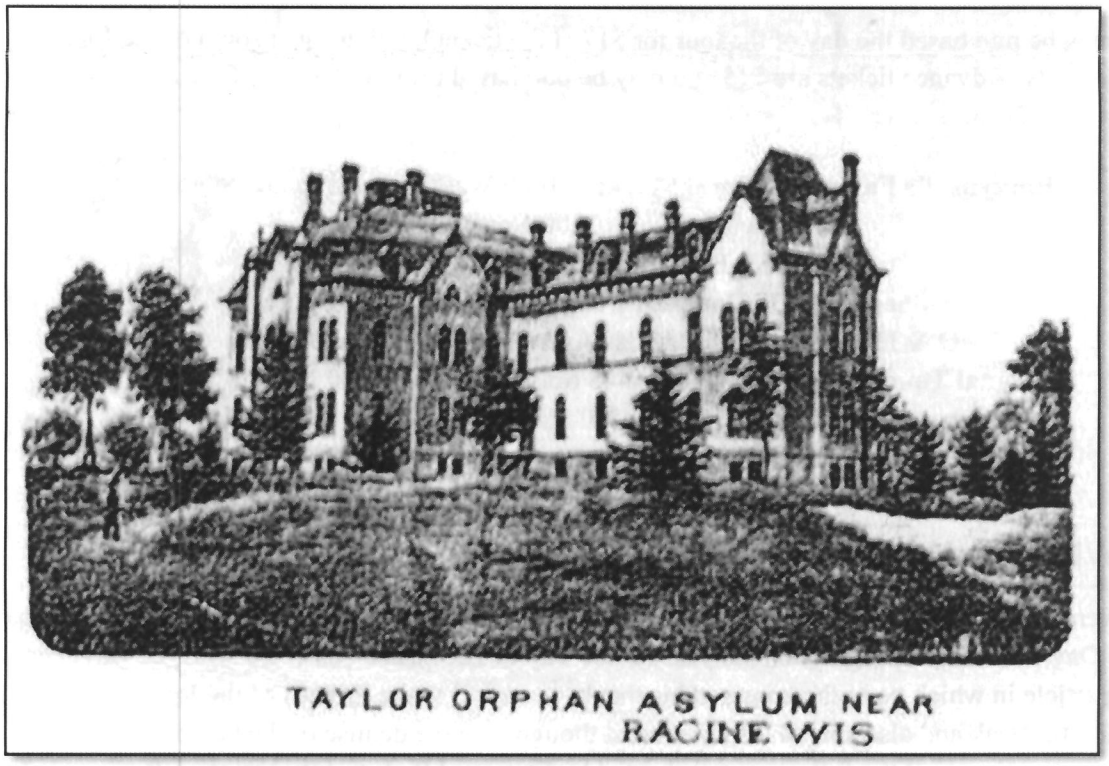
Early in my memoir of the six happy years of my childhood spent at Taylor Children's Home, I bemoaned the Home's demise in 1972:

> ***So it was for this century-old progressive sanctuary for children. The reforms of its past were ground into the debris of our present — out of sight, out of mind and, ultimately, out of memory.***
>
> *—The Kid Who Climbed the Tarzan Tree*

But as you knew all along and I did not, Racine had decidedly *not* let Taylor Orphan Asylum slip "out of memory." Obvious to me now is that when I wrote the book, I had woefully misjudged the collective goodness and long memory of the city that had once embraced me as a hapless boy in need. You deserved better. Far better.

The indisputable proof of my error had revealed itself to me in but three days recently. Droves of "witnesses" had turned out in Racine for remembrances of the Home: a reading of the book at the Racine Public Library on the afternoon of April 3; a dinner presentation organized by Preservation Racine on April 7; and the following morning a tour of the Home's grounds hosted by the Village of Elmwood Park.

An astounding 250 persons showed up for these commemorations of Isaac and Emmerline Taylor's deathbed dreams of a refuge for children set adrift by circumstance. Although the Cream City bricks laid in 1868 by architect and builder Lucas Bradley have remained interred at 3131 Taylor Avenue since 1972, their legacy I now know abides above ground, preserved in cultural memory.



Just as astoundingly, many individuals unexpectedly came forward during these ceremonies with touching personal recollections contained in family histories, scrapbooks, pictures, memorabilia and personal narratives. Among them were at least a dozen former residents of the Home. They had been children there. They had emerged from the mists of Racine history to give witness to the goodness of their lives there.

Now often white-haired, but seeming as if boy and girl wraiths from a time distantly disturbing, they spoke of their gratitude for both the sanctuary and sunlight brought by Taylor Home to their troubled childhoods. The audiences sat rapt and proud. Some were moved to tears.

Over those three April days in 2014, Racine had brightly rekindled its memory of the hundreds and hundreds of lost children it had welcomed and weaned for better lives for over a century at Taylor Orphan Asylum. The memory had not, as I had blithely suggested, perished. It has endured.

Thanks be to your city, to Elmwood Park and to all those who have preserved not only the life of a historic wonder but also a reverence for—as a famous contemporary of the Taylors put it—"the better angels of our nature." Thanks to you, Racine, Taylor Orphan Asylum lives. Again, I apologize for thinking otherwise.

D. W. Rozelle, April 21, 2014

From the President

It is tour time again. Time to have a chance to learn more about some of the historic buildings we have in Racine. I am not sure who learns more about the buildings on the tour, the people taking the tour or the people that own the building. There are hours of research that go into finding the history of the building. The owner learns about past owners and about the features of the building. Many times they also get a chance to meet with people that owned the building before them and to hear the stories about the property's past. The people taking the tour get to learn information from the tour guides; they get to appreciate how the owners have taken the time to keep their property well maintained. We should all be grateful that the owners are willing to share their properties with us allowing friends and strangers to walk through them.

I was reminded again this week of the joy in owning an old home. The doorbell rang and standing on the front porch was one of the great-grandchildren of the couple that built our home. They were in Racine and wanted to see the home they had heard about as they grew up. We were as thrilled to show them our home and hear their stories as they were to see the home and hear our stories.

I would like to thank everyone that is helping with this year's tour. The buildings we will be able to tour are just a sample of the many historic buildings in Racine. I hope you will enjoy seeing the buildings and learning some of the history of them and Racine. We need to take advantage of seeing these historic buildings when we can, we never know if something will happen to an historic building and we may not be able to see it the same way ever again.

Don Schumacher
President Preservation Racine

Research Collection Donations

We extend our warmest thanks to Clem A. Krivich for his recent donations to Preservation Racine's research collection. Chief among these are rare early plat maps of Racine (1878) and of Mound Cemetery in its surrounding area. Mr. Krivich also plans to fill the gaps in our collection of city directories by replacing any currently missing volumes. Since there are no complete sets locally, Preservation Racine will become the only holder of the entire sequence of directories.

These are highly important donations because they enable property research to begin. Plat maps establish the changing wards which are key to locating the tax records for any specific property. Because the tax records list the changing owners and assessed values of each property, they give a strong indication of building, extension, and razing dates and make it possible to locate the more detailed history contained in the city directories. Not only are the earliest city directories rare, but they are indexed by property owner, rather than street, so these early plat maps and city directories are crucial to researching our first-generation historic properties.

The gift is complemented by the additional donation of most (if not all) newspaper articles by the important Racine historian, Eugene W. Leach (1857–1938), early images of Racine street scenes, and photographs of the Main Street depot as the men left for the First World War. With these gifts, everyone's ability to research local properties and streets has greatly increased.

Pippin Michelli

Jim Fiene Plunges In

All is flush at Blake House again thanks to Jim Fiene, a dedicated member of the Blake House Committee, who oversaw the extensive efforts to repair the major sewer line collapse that was discovered in January. According to committee member, Porter Venn, the existing clay pipes were most likely original to the house and had probably been leaking, unnoticed, for some time. However, the "winter of the Polar Vortex" created an impermeable 48" frost line, so the sewer backed up into the basement. Repairs cost about $30,000 and included new fiberglass sewer pipes, a new basement floor, better grading and a fresh front lawn. "This was an exceptionally big, months-long project involving several stages and four different contractors." said Porter. "Jim provided excellent leadership and oversight throughout the process." Porter went on to say that for many years Jim has handled all of the projects that go with being the landlord of Blake House and has done so quietly and unassumingly without expecting anything in return. "He's just an all-around terrific guy," Porter said. "Preservation Racine is really fortunate to have him."

Carrie Bergs

Starving Artists Fair

Preservation Racine once again had a booth at the Starving Artists Fair in East Park on Sunday, August 3. This is the event where the sites for Preservation Racine's annual Tour of Historic Places are announced. Tony Merlo, Jim Mercier, and Ron Dunnett set up and took down the booth. They along with Nat Cycenas, Heather Egan, Steve Gancarz, Nancy Iversen, Marcia Pfost and Karen Urben were greeters and tended the booth. George Mangold designed and produced the tour poster, incorporating Charles Vallone's photographs of the seven tour sites. This handsome poster is now on display in Seebecks Gallery. Thank you to all of our volunteers.

Save the date

Preservation Racine's next membership meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, November 3, will be at the Miller House located at 1110 South Main Street. Peg and Lou Larson will talk about the trials and tribulations of renovating an historic property. We will also hear the history of the Miller house.

Vivian Merlo

Picture Credits: The drawing of the Taylor Orphan Asylum on page 2 is from the [plat] map of Racine and Kenosha Counties, Wisconsin, 1873, in the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Archives and Area Research Center (& map title graphic above)