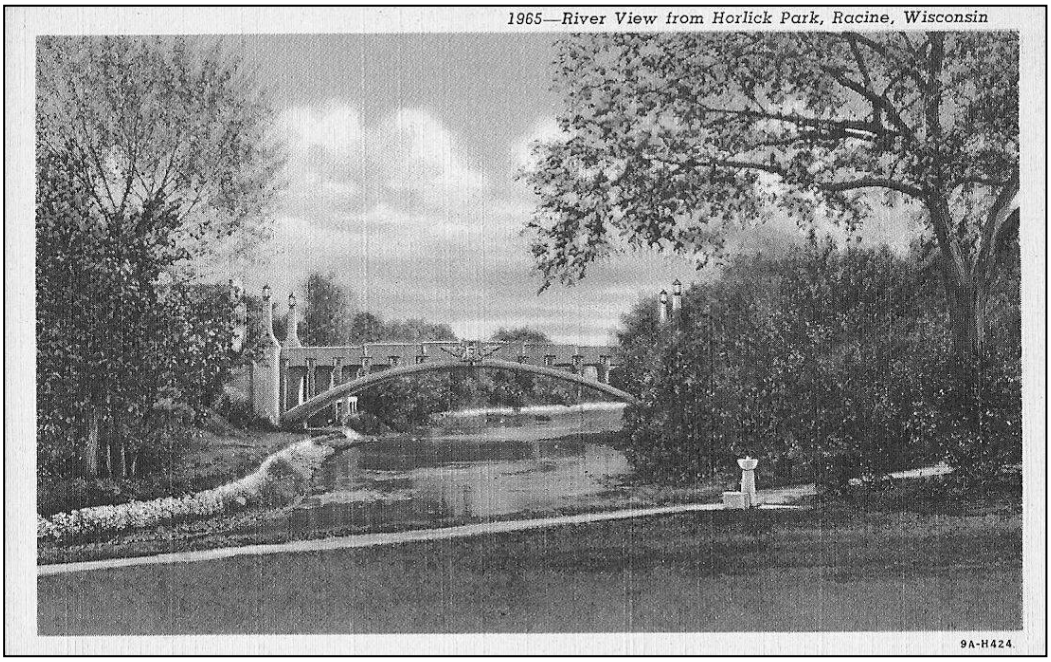
PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

SPRING 2016
Volume 4

The West Sixth Street Bridge: Civic Pride and Purpose

On January 27, the city of Racine's Planning Council held a public involvement meeting to receive input about the planned replacement of the bridge on West Sixth Street. The bridge has been designated "structurally deficient" and "functionally obsolete," although it is not considered unsafe and it still carries traffic. In fact, a majority of bridges still in use in America are now designated both structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. Replacing the bridge is thus not yet a foregone conclusion, not least because funding for the structural replacement (at an estimated cost of $2 ½ million) has not yet been approved by the State. Design funding at $400,000 has been approved, and this allows the city and its consultants, Ayres Associates, to explore options and designs.



Postcard showing Horlick Park probably during 1950s, Zumach collection, Racine, WI (with kind permission)

The bridge is an important one both for its history and its design, and it is integral to Racine's equally historic and important park system. Its loss, if it happens, will therefore be a tragedy. It has, of course, reached its present state as a result of forgone maintenance over the years – this, no doubt, caused by funding shortages in the past. Let us take a look at the bridge and its context, with a view to considering constructive and viable ways forward. The city and its consultants are still seeking public input by mail: contact Mr. David Pantzlaff, PE, Ayres Associates, N17 W24222 Riverwood Drive, Suite 310, Waukesha, WI 53188.

The Historic Context: Racine's Parks

The bridge was designed as a focal point of our visual heritage: the part of our environment that creates our sense of rootedness, identity and social cohesion. Thus it is not merely a functional thing – although that provides its initial raison d'être. It is intended to be viewed from the road, walkway and watercourse that pass beneath it. As the infrastructure of this part of Racine's historic park system, these, too, are integral to our essential visual heritage. The West Sixth Street bridge, therefore, is a lynchpin in the local socio-urban complex. Its sociological function is as crucial as its structural, historical and aesthetic integrity.

This is no accident. When the city of Racine instituted its park system, it brought in nationally significant consultants. Some wooded tracts of land had previously been deeded to the city for park use and already functioned in that capacity. Luther College was built on a high bluff overlooking some of this land in 1902, and staff and students could enjoy the view from a two level sheltered balcony that wrapped around the east and south sides of the building. The land included some that had belonged to an important early settler, James Kinzie, and was known as "Kinzie Island". Kinzie built the first bridge there in 1850, and this was followed in 1865 by a more elaborate one petitioned for by Horatio G. Winslow and James R. Slausen, both of whom

raised money to help pay for it. In 1890, an iron Howe truss bridge was erected there by the Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Co., whose distinctive forward-looking methods resulted in a design repeated by that company all over the state and elsewhere. Assuming that this bridge was typical, we can infer that it looked like the Bieneman Farm bridge in Burlington (1877). This is the bridge that would have formed part of the view from Luther College in 1902.

The city's park system was launched in 1905 by Mayor Peter B. Nelson (in office 1903-7), and the activities of his Park Commission were reported regularly in the *Racine Daily Journal* and in the *Official Proceedings* of the Common Council. So we know that Mayor Nelson's city clerk was one William H. Armstrong, who went on to become Racine's longest serving mayor (five two-year terms, 1919-21, 1923-31). The Park Commission immediately petitioned for a strip of land between Luther College's bluff and the river, running from West Sixth Street to Twelfth Street. Within a year, Luther College had sold some of its land in that area to the city for park use, and William Mitchell Lewis had donated land for a playground a little to the north, on a spur in the river fork just west of what was then Horlick Park. Horlick Park was in the northern half of what was already known as Island Park, and in 1906 William Horlick bought the rest of that land and donated it all to the city. By 1906, then, the city owned park land running southwards around the river from Spring Street to Twelfth Street. Jens Jensen was commissioned to design an entire park system, and is also credited with designing the two neoclassical arched concrete bridges on Horlick Drive that were completed in 1907 under Mayor Alexander J. Horlick (a cousin of William Horlick). Jensen complemented these with two footbridges: one was a small wooden truss on stone piers over the river spur that separated off the Lewis Field playground, the other was a similar but suspended wooden truss connecting to Washington Park.

In fact, the Parks Commission was seeking to create a road circuit on city park land through trees and meadows, over and under beautiful bridges. In 1907 they tried to ensure that the new bridge connecting Lafayette and Herrick Avenues where they met at the Root River (now combined as North Memorial Drive) would also be an arched concrete one. Petitioning the city Council, they argued,

> *…throughout the United States, where any effort is made to beautify the cities, concrete bridges are now supplanting the old style iron bridges, and it seems desirable that Racine make progress with other cities.*

And, they went on,

Especially should this be done in view of the fact that the concrete bridge instead of decaying and requiring additional expense for re-flooring and repainting, etc., avoids these expenses and becomes more durable with time.

They further explained,

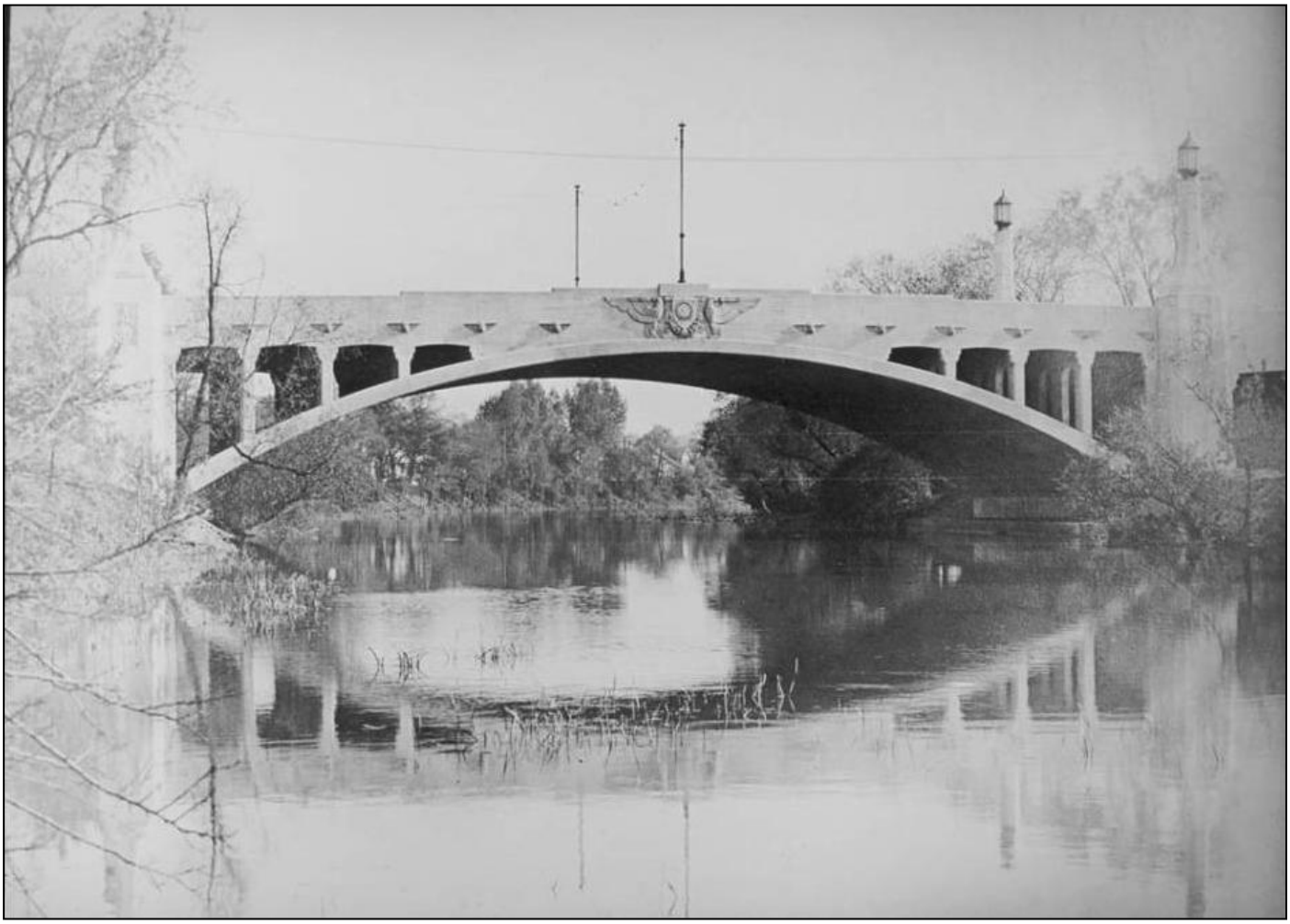
> *The board is deeply interested in the matter and they trust in time to be able to continue a drive over Ninth street along Root river connecting with the proposed drive now being laid out by the board through Riverside park.*

The petition was not successful at the time. Perhaps not surprisingly, the city chose the $5,700 bid from the Milwaukee Bridge Co. instead of the approximately $20,000 proposal put forward by City Engineer Connolly. The proposal was defeated by Alderman W. F. Hilker, who owned the large brickyard less than two blocks from the bridge. He argued that its main purpose would be for pedestrians on their way to and from work and the cost could not therefore be justified. Ironically, his brickyard later became part of the park system and is now Cedar Bend Park. Ninth Street was never extended the bare two blocks needed to connect it with Twelfth Street and complete the circuit.

West Sixth Street Bridge

The Horlick Drive bridges were replaced with almost identical structures in 1925. So when it came time to replace the Howe Truss bridge on West Sixth Street, the park system was well established, with a large section of the road circuit in place. It was possible to drive on city owned parkland from Twelfth Street, alongside the river on Horlick Park Drive, under West Sixth Street bridge and over an arched bridge into Horlick Park itself, and northwards to the second arched bridge that led to Liberty Street. The first of the two arched bridges was clearly seen from West Sixth Street, and Racine's Mayor was William H. Armstrong who had been city clerk when the scheme began.

Charles Whitney was a nationally respected consulting engineer in Milwaukee, whose planning, design, and construction supervision services included work on highways and bridges. His publications included formative developmental work in plastic theory and ultimate strength methods of reinforced concrete



Photograph of West Sixth Street Bridge from Magic Lantern slide made by Charles S Whitney, c.1928-31, Ryerson and Burnham Archive, SAIC, Chicago (with kind permission)

design. He was probably the highest quality consultant that could be found, and in 1927 he was commissioned to produce two bridges for Racine: one in Mound Cemetery and one at West Sixth Street. Both were to be concrete arch "park" bridges. The one he designed for Mound Cemetery is a close copy of the original Horlick Drive bridges, with a neoclassical balustrade and flush concrete walls. It was completed in 1928 and Whitney illustrated it on plate 281 of his book, *Bridges: A Study in their Art, Science and Evolution* (1929). In that book, Whitney argues for restrained decoration and crusades against the cost-cutting practice of making the bridge supports narrower than the roadway so that the road deck jutted from each side in a manner he considered ugly. In fact, jutting decks of this kind had just been introduced on the recently replaced Horlick Drive bridges, and they are notably absent from his own Mound Cemetery bridge.

So we can see how the West Sixth Street bridge reflects his professional convictions: it is a sleek design that pushed the structural possibilities of concrete to its limit, shunned a jutting road deck, and kept the structural decoration to a minimum. The bridge is a graceful one with a shallow arch, arcaded open spandrels with only the barest silhouette-suggestion of classical column-capitals, and no jutting deck or cornice. Instead, there are colored terra cotta ornaments applied like a restrained necklace along the deck line. These were produced by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company in Chicago, and they are absolutely unique. It is not known who designed them but there may be a clue to this because Whitney seems to have been pleased with the bridge and he took a romantic photograph of it soon after its construction. So far as we know, this is the only extant photo that shows all six of the original light fixtures. The photo survives, oddly isolated, in Chicago's Ryerson and Burnham archive, and it is therefore tempting to wonder if this implies the involvement of prominent Chicago architect Daniel Burnham (who is known to have worked with the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company) in the design

of the terra cotta ornaments: quasi-heraldic crests at the center and ends of the bridge and winged dolphin gargoyles along the deck line. This would certainly increase their importance.

Whitney was not the only one pleased with the bridge. When it opened in December 1928, it was described as "the city's most beautiful structure", and as "the city's handsomest bridge". It is popularly reported that the bridge was also known as "Armstrong's Folly" owing to its extreme expense. At $90,000, the bridge was certainly expensive! But it is a thing of beauty that featured on several postcards, including this one from the Zumach collection, which shows it at an early stage, clearly contributing to the beauty of the park and with a bubbler set invitingly in the foreground.

It is still a lovely thing, surviving with almost all its original components intact and in situ. The lights at the ends were mounted on terra cotta columns set on the pierheads, and the ornamental access panels to their wiring are still in place on the pierheads. Unfortunately the columns corroded, and in 1969 the lamps were dispersed. Two now flank the entrance to the Racine Heritage Museum, one is in private possession, and one disintegrated when it was dismantled. There is a postscript to this story. Mayor Armstrong died in 1931. Three years later a proposal to replace that Lafayette Avenue bridge with a concrete arch park bridge produced a design that was acknowledged as a streamlined version of the West Sixth Street bridge. The deck did not project much and Charles Whitney bid for it. Sadly, his bid was too expensive and the contract went to Klug & Smith of Milwaukee, with the proviso that they complete the riverside drive that would pass under it. In the event, they built a bridge with the strongly jutting deck that Whitney so deplored. That bridge, too, now called the Memorial Drive bridge, is slated for replacement.

Back to Today

We never quite got our park drive circuit, but we did get our parks and we did get some beautiful bridges. It is worth remembering that no efforts were spared for this project, that the best professionals in their field were commissioned to design both the parks and the bridges, and that the whole enterprise was the brainchild of highly motivated citizens, industrialists and officials in Racine. What a shame to let them down so badly by neglecting the urban heritage set up with such pride by them. If the West Sixth Street bridge indeed needs to come down, we must think what would best honor the creators of our parks and bridges. Can any of the terra cotta be saved and possibly re-used as accent pieces in the new bridge, or relocated in a public spot such as one of our parks? And if we must build a new bridge, is it really best to produce an anemic nod at Whitney's design, or would it be better to look ahead and produce something equally beautiful but as forward-looking now as his design was then?

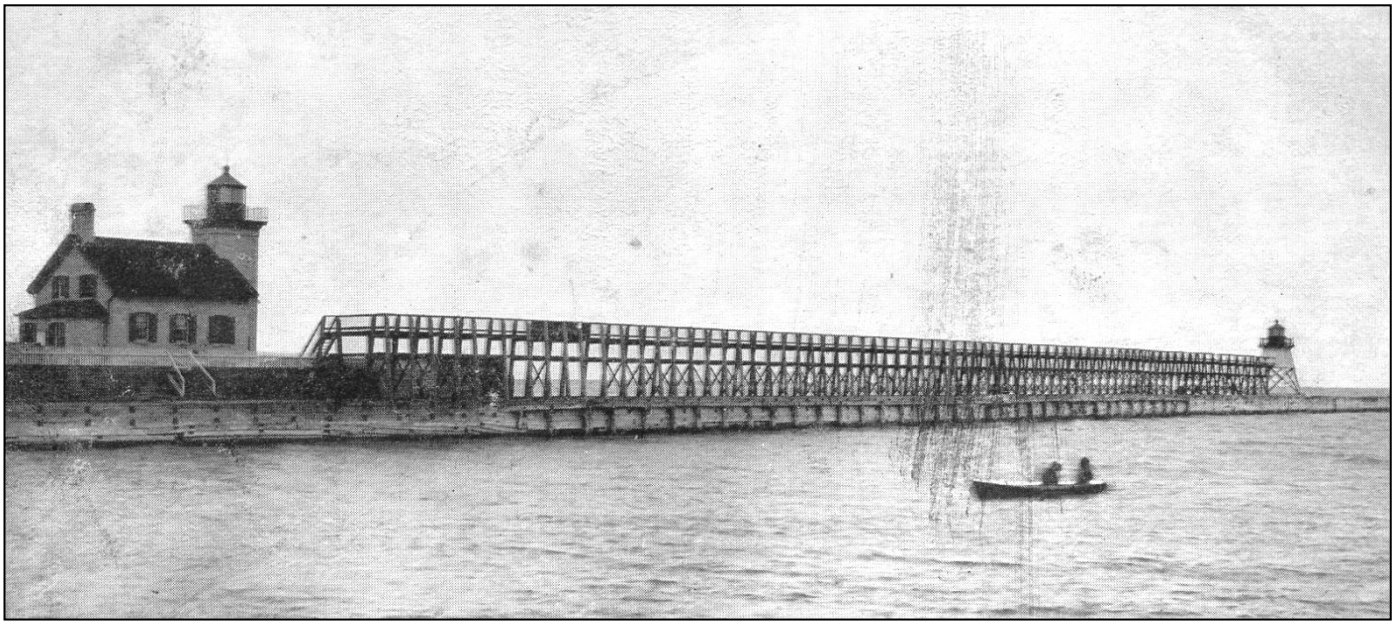
Pippin Michelli

Cruising up the River

The Root River has been the artery that has sustained the life blood of the City of Racine from its very beginning. Captain Gilbert Knapp, originally from Chatham, Cape Cod, Massachusetts and a lake boat captain, first saw where the Root River emptied into Lake Michigan when in government service and admired the location. He returned to this same spot in November of 1834 founding the settlement that would become Racine. In Mr. E. W. Leach's book, *The Methodist Church and Early Racine,* it says "For a year or two after the first settlers arrived the place was called 'Root River'." The Indians called the river "Chippecotton" the meaning of which is "root".

A place for commerce and industry:

The Federal Government authorized the building of the Root River Light House, the first Racine light house, to guide mariners to safety on Racine's shore in 1839. The forty foot high lighthouse stood near what is now Racine's Public Library and was built of cream brick produced by Benjamin Pratt, the first brick manufacturer in Racine. Large shipments of wheat were coming through the village by 1842 and people were agitating for a harbor. With little help from the Federal Government, $30,000 was raised locally to develop a harbor within the next 10 years. By 1860 there was a grain elevator, warehouses, tall ships, paddle wheelers and scows supporting a healthy marine business. Many of these boats were manufactured in Racine by the Racine Boat Manufacturing Company, which was situated up river. As early as the 1860s, bridges crossed the river first at Main Street, Fourth and Second Streets. The first, short lived bridge was built near Main Street in 1838but by 1843 it was carried away by high water. The truss bridges were painted white and eventually replaced with iron bridges. Up river, west of the harbor, commercial business developed on both sides of the river. These businesses included the Racine Woolen Mills, D. P. Wigley Warehouse, William H. Pugh Coal yard and Dr. Shoop's patent medicine building. Still



Lighthouse and pier, Racine, WI, post card mailed 1907, Tony Merlo collection (with kind permission)

farther up the river, near the Sixth Street Bridge, the Lake Shore Railroad Trestle was built to cross the Root River Valley. By 1875-6 the trestle was filled in and a double track iron bridge was built to replace it. Looking along the river, from Liberty and Marquette Streets to the east, the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company buildings dominated the river's bank with loading docks and railroad tracks in place. It was the availability of Racine's water rights that brought Jerome I. Case to Racine from Rochester, Wisconsin.

A place for recreation:
In 1905 Racine mayor Peter B. Nelson initiated the idea of a public park system for the City of Racine. The beautiful 1928 West Sixth Street Bridge was built to enhance the park area and became an important route between McKinley Junior High School, Jefferson Grade School, Park High School and Holy Communion Church for people who lived in the neighborhood. In the 1940s students went home for lunch every day, which meant that if they lived east or west of the bridge, they crossed the bridge four times a day. Those crossings became an important part of the school experience for many students. It was a place where smaller children stood on tiptoe to watch the river below and older children always observed, with curiosity, the river activity as it flowed to the lake. Often someone was fishing along the river bank in the warmer weather or a canoe or light boat was being paddled under the bridge. In the winter the river was crowded with skaters whizzing from the West Sixth Street Bridge to the "swinging footbridge bridge" and back. The sound of ice cracking and shifting in the dark was part of the fun and the terror. After a good snow the hills surrounding Horlick Drive were filled with sleds and their eager riders. The West Sixth Street Bridge, Root River and the surrounding parks were an important part of life for the children in that area and for everyone in the surrounding community.

Another desirable destination for river entertainment was above Horlick Dam. This part of the river began as a fur trading site. William See, a preacher and father of the first Mrs. James Kinzie, built a mill in 1835 at the rapids on the Root River. Settlers had lumber sawn here for their homes and later a grist mill was built. Limestone quarried in Horlicksville near the dam went into the mortar used for the construction of many Racine brick buildings.

Below the dam, effluence was sometimes run into the river, but the water was considered clear north of the dam and it was another world of entertainment. In the early 20th Century, a phenomenon called Go-Devils became popular on the frozen river in an area called Horlicksville. Go-devils were river sleds with equipped with runners, handmade propellers and automobile engines removed from personal cars for power (balloon tires and poor roads meant that automobiles would need to be stored for the winter). These sleds were capable of reaching speeds of 60 miles per hour as they raced across the frozen river.*

In the 1920s and 30s cottages lined the river north of Horlick Dam. Parties and weekend frivolities were common all during the year. In the winter, skating, ice hockey, ice fishing and ice boating were popular activities. Pat Murphy remembers ice hockey on most Saturdays during the winter, with Guy Dixon opening

his cottage to be used as a warming house. Sundays you were back on the ice, skating to the iron bridge near the dam. Pat reported that because of weak ankles she could skate to the red iron bridge, but her father would lovingly tow her back using his hockey stick. Summer brought Venetian Nights with decorated boats and picnicking. Richard Horlick, his wife Josephine and his brother Charles operated Kiddieland for twenty-seven years after WWII. It was an amusement park located on the east side of the river on Rapids Drive. You could pay for an amusement ride with the cardboard paper caps that sealed Progressive Dairy milk bottles you had collected.

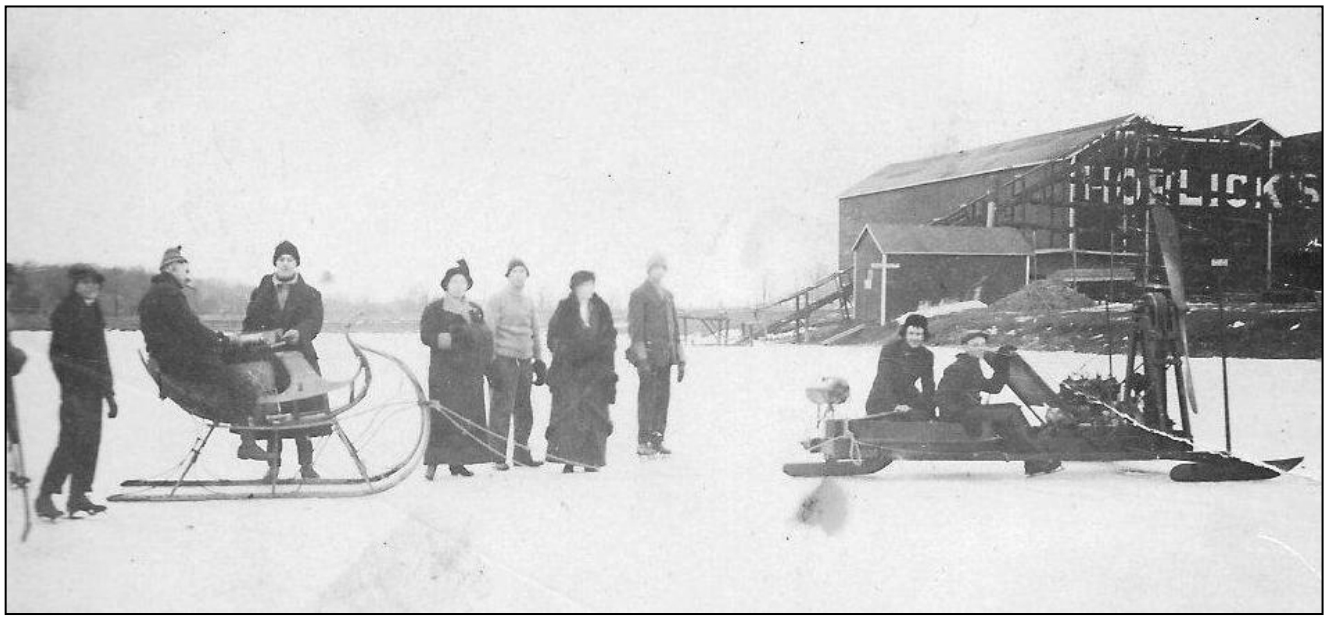
On Saturday, July 26, 1924 the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan hosted a Wisconsin State Ceremonial Parade and Picnic at Klan Park. They met along the Root River behind what is now the Racine Country Club and extended to the area near what is now Meadowbrook Country Club. That day began at 10:30 a.m. with "(1 salute) Clown Band enters grounds in style of 1868", followed by the Imperial Klan Quartette, rope and balancing acts and band concert. The afternoon featured various speakers followed by a parade.

Participants were asked to robe and join in the parade. The parade route directions were: "Passing speaker's stand, the parade will follow the line of flags through Klan Park, across marked route over Golf Links to State Street - East on State Street to Main - South on Main to Sixth Street - West on Sixth Street to Country Club - across Golf Links, pass Reviewing Stand at Klan Park and disband." The evening concluded with singing, an Aerial Circus and fireworks at 11:15 p.m.*

The Root River continues to be a vital part of the Racine community. Out of state fishermen can be seen trying their luck at hooking a salmon as they spawn up the river. The proposed Machinery Row development promises a beautiful river walk for everyone to enjoy, canoes and kayaks can be rented at Root Works rec for a leisurely paddle in either direction on the river.

* To read the February 17, 1998 article written by Lee Roberts for the Racine Journal Times concerning the Go-Devils, go to the Journal Times archive.
* Thank you to Jim Mercier for the information on the Ku Klux Klan

Vivian Merlo and Heather Egan



Go-Devil ready to go! In the background is the Horlick's ice house. Jerry Karwowski notes that this situates the scene 1/4 mile upriver from the dam. Jim and Roberta Fiene collection (with kind permission)

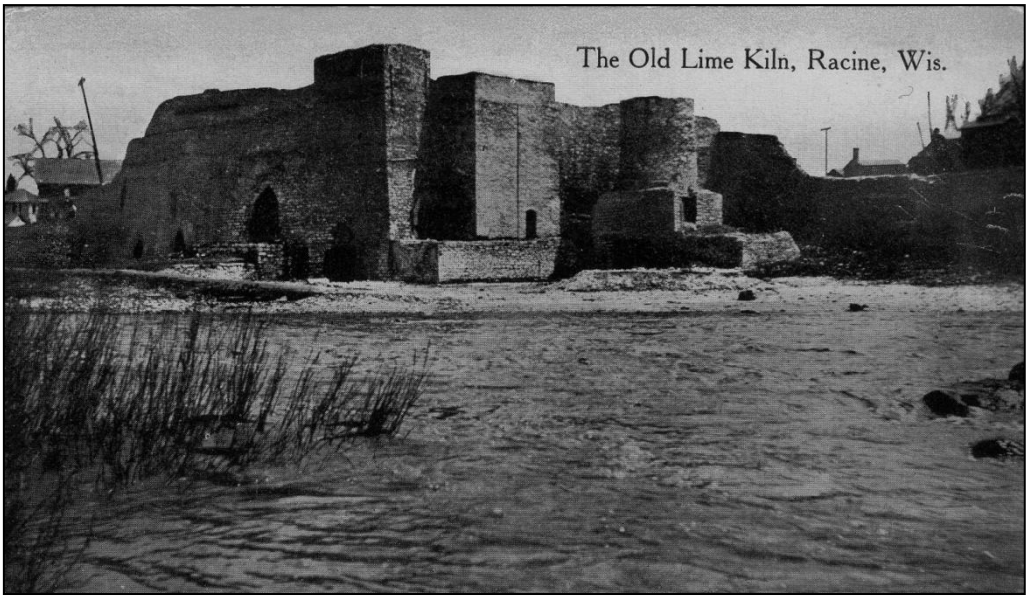
From the President

I have been president for two years now and am looking forward hopefully to being re-elected for a second two year term.

This has been a very busy two years:

- The Century Buildings program was enhanced last year.
- The Tour of Historic Places also saw changes with this last tour being one of our most successful tours.

- We were able to have the support of Real Racine in both of these events. (This just shows how working together helps everyone involved.)
- We have made changes to our by-laws to help improve how we conduct business.
- We started a new revenue committee.
- Next year we will be going to a new computer based accounting system.
- The board had a half day meeting where a five year plan was inaugurated. We have completed most of what was on the first year's list.



Old Lime Kiln on Root River, Tony Merlo collection (with kind permission)

In the next two years I plan to:

- Revisit the five year plan and revise as needed
- Build the Blake House Porch
- See results from the new revenue committee
- Form a better working relationship with the city and other preservation organization.

I want to thank Charlie Rice a founding member of Preservation Racine upon his retirement from the Board. For the last 15 years Charlie served as treasurer. Charlie has stepped down but he assured me that he will continue to come to the general meetings. Charlie Rice's commitment and efforts will not be forgotten.

Don Schumacher

Coming Up: Membership Meetings:

Monday, March 7, 2016, 6:00 p.m.
The Racine Business Center, 1405 16th Street. We are to enter at the 1405 entrance, take the passenger elevator to the second floor and follow the signs to the meeting room (cafeteria-Chez Bob.) Triple treat: Emily Rench Montgomery will speak on the history of her family's building and the ongoing exhibit "Spirit of Racine Entrepreneurs." Jim Mercier will speak on local entrepreneurs and their Racine-made products. Chez Bob will serve his special crème puffs.

Monday, April 4, 2016, 7:00 p.m.
East Park Towers Party Room, 111 - 11th Street. Michael Rehberg will invite us to "Pull up a Chair, Let's Take a Walk" as he leads us on a journey around and about Lake Geneva. Michael is a former Racine resident and served as a member of the Preservation Racine Board of Directors.

Monday, May 2, 2016, 6:00 p.m.

The Great Hall at the DeKoven Center. Century Building Certificate Awards

National Preservation Month: May 2016

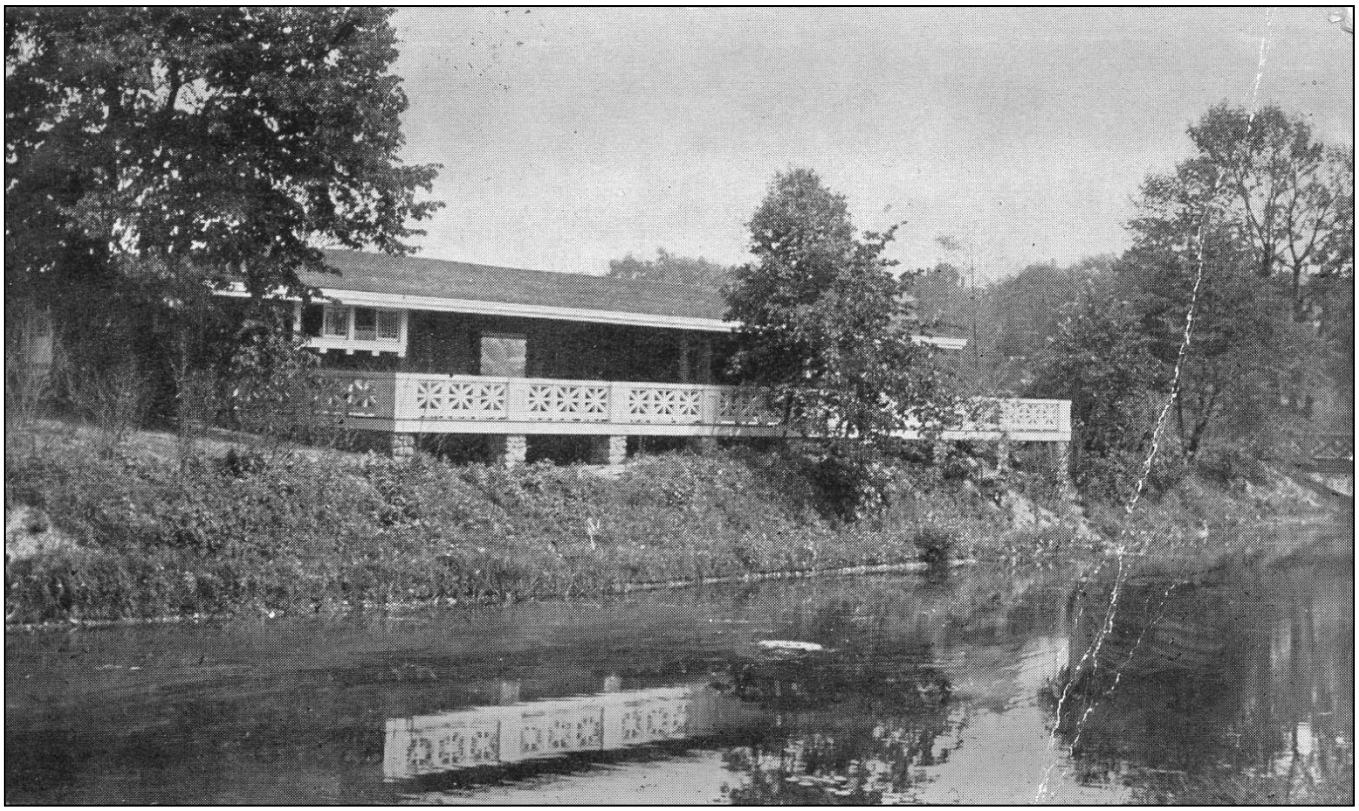
Wright Plus
Saturday, May 21, 2016
Oak Park and River Forest, IL

"Wright and the Prairie School including Wright, Drummond, Van Bergen, Byrne and more."

Additional information is available at1-312-994-4000 and www.shopwright.org.

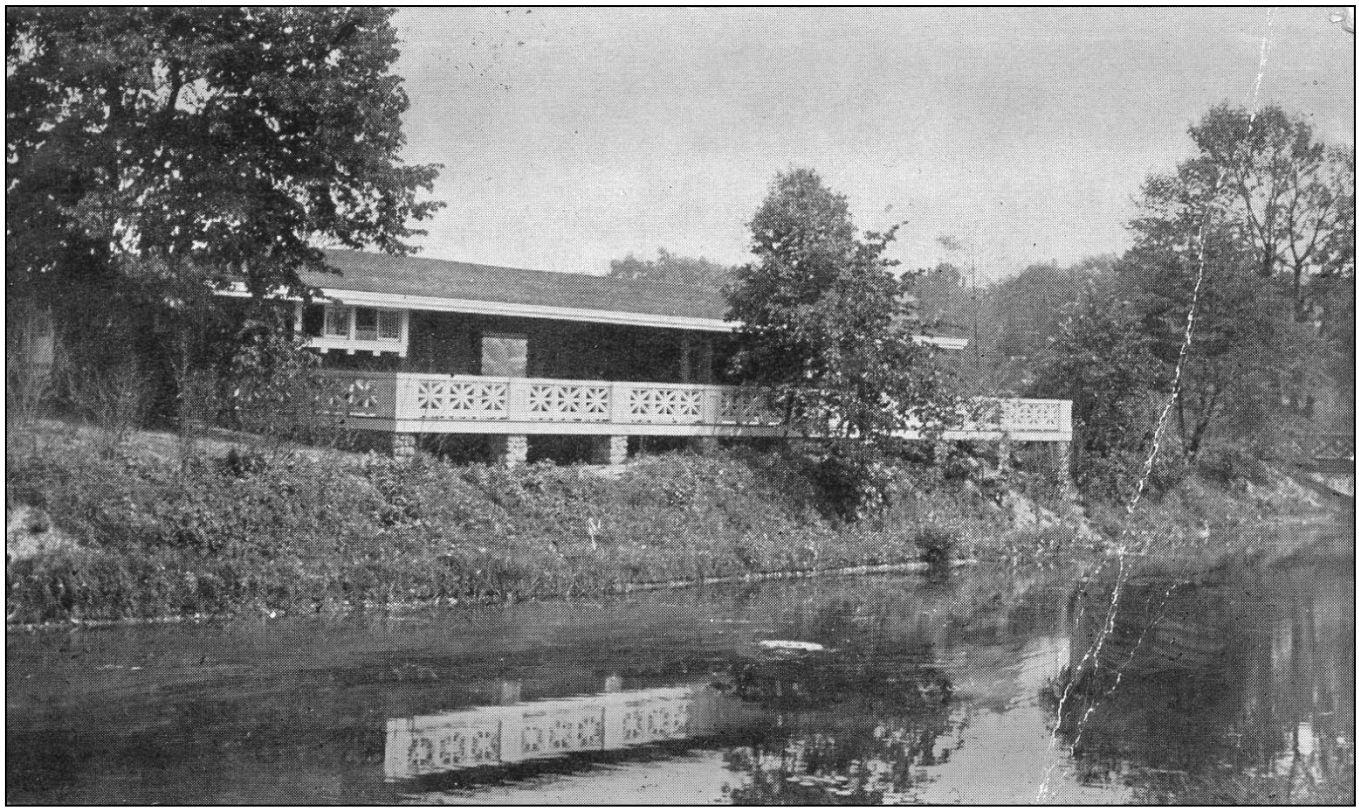
Wright and Like
June 3-5, 2016 Racine, Wisconsin

On Friday evening, June 3, an illustrated talk entitled "A Visual Feast of Modern Architecture in Racine over 100 Years" will be presented. "Sixty Years of Organic Architecture: Hardy-Prairie School" is the theme of the tour that will take place on Saturday, June 4.Note: Anyone interested in being a tour guide may email Mark Hertzberg at mark.s.hertzberg@gmail.com. There will be three sessions of 2.5 hours each between the hours of 9 to 5. A special event is being scheduled for Sunday, June 5. Additional informationabout the tour weekend will be available in April at www.wrightinwisconsin.org.



Island Park was officially renamed Horlick Park in 1906, after William Horlick purchased it and added to his own park and then donated the entire parcel to the city. The park was designed by Jens Jensen, and the pavilion was designed by A. Arthur Guilbert. The entire park occupied the land where the Root River split and rejoined. The waterway seen here is a spur of the river that no longer exists.

The distinctive Shoop Building on State Street can be seen in the background, with the D.P. Wigley Building just in front of it. The train track passed through the D.P. Wigley building.



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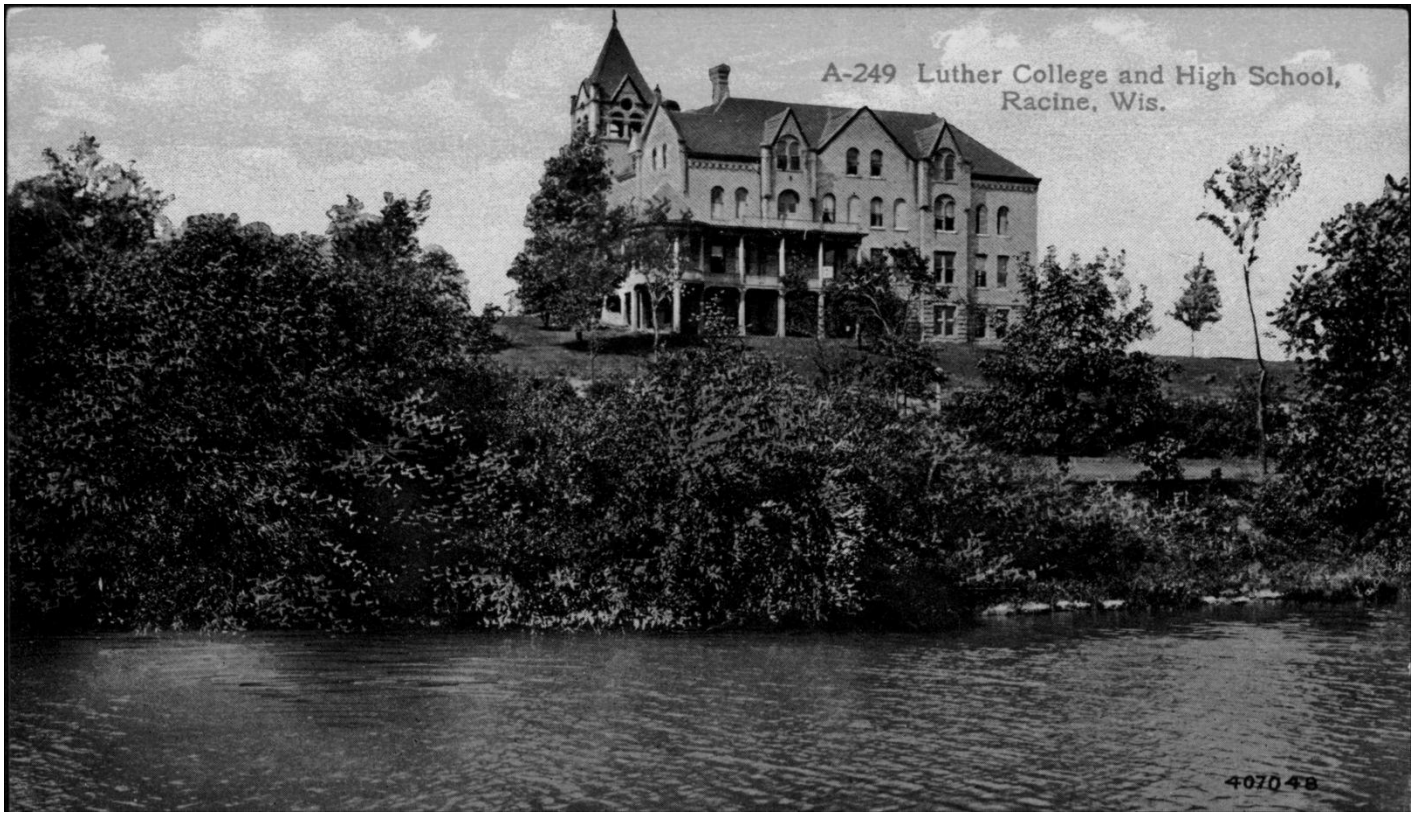

Luther College, founded 1902, Bishop postcard 1900-1920, Todd Wallace collection

On the anniversary date of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1941, Preservation Racine members and guests were transported back to that historic period by a portrayal of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the thirty–second President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (terms 1933-1945). Jessica Michna, a Racine actress and historian, has mastered the unique voice and accent of the then First Lady. Adding to the credibility of her presentation was the authenticity of clothing fashionof that period.

The site of the meeting was another treat. It was the first time for most of the membership to enter into the newly renovated Lochnaiar Inn. This building received a Century Building Award in May of 2015 marking its centennial year. It was built for John Reid, Jr. and his wife, Jeanette, the granddaughter of Steven Bull. They chose Racine architects Guilbert and Funston to design the English Tudor Revival Style residence. John Reid, Jr. was the president of the Belle City Manufacturing Company in Racine.

Barbara S. Walter

Century Building Awards 2016

The 2016 Century Building Awards research committee has started work on identifying and researching the10-12 buildings for this year's event celebrating National Preservation Month in May. Researchers include Nat Cycenus, Vivian Merlo, Barbara Walter, Jan Carter, Marcia Pfost, Pippin Michelli, Karen Urben and committee co-chairs Carrie Bergs and Jacki Mekemson. Charles Vallone has graciously agreed to do the photography again this year. This popular community event recognizes and awards building owners who have maintained, preserved, renovated and restored buildings in Racine County that are at least 100 years old. The buildings will be showcased in the next newsletter.

The event will take place Monday May 2 in the Great Hall of the DeKoven Center. The reception honoring the homeowners will begin at 6 pm followed by the program and the awards at 7 pm. Preservation Racine members are the hosts for this event and are asked to bring a side dish or desert for the dinner buffet. Beverages will be provided. If you would like to volunteer to help with this event please contact **Jacki 939-6300** or **Carrie 878-1609**.

realracine
America's Kringle Capital

Real Racine is pleased to have helped promote two events by Preservation R this year. In May we were associated with the *Century Buildings Awards* in which eleven buildings in Racine County were researched and recognized for their preservation in good condition. In September we initiated promotions outside Racine County for the *Tour of Historic Places (Life Along the Lake)*, in which ten locations were researched and opened to the public.

Visit our location at I-94 on Highway 20 or you can visit us regularly on the web at ***www.realracine.com***.

14015 Washington Ave. 884-6400

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

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Membership Renewal

Thank you again for your continued support of Preservation Racine

Your membership dues are important. As a member, you support the following:

- **Newsletters:** tell you about the history of buildings, parks and monuments in Racine County.
- **Programs:** take us to interesting buildings, including houses, churches, schools, barns and more, always with an educational component.
- **Century Buildings:** are celebrated each year during National Preservation Month in May. In twenty-seven years, we have honored 367 buildings in Racine County.
- **Tour of Historic Places:** is the annual presentation of a select group of buildings that are graciously opened to the public by their owners.
- **Preservation:** including that of the Blake House (Preservation Racine's headquarters). The Blake House has a secure future, having been purchased by Preservation Racine and re-designated as a local landmark under Racine's Landmarks Preservation Ordinance.

Please help us pursue our mission to identify and promote the preservation of buildings and districts with historical and architectural significance. Our community's need for preservation initiatives has never been more important. On Racine's Main Street alone, three significant buildings have narrowly missed being raised recently. Respect for old buildings can translate into the development of our environmental and economic sustainability.

Preservation Racine is a 501(c) 3 corporation and membership is fully tax-deductible.

Sincerely,

Marcia Pfost
Membership Chair

Membership renewal is due in March. The label on the front of this newsletter shows your membership expiration date. To renew and invest in our community's preservation fill out and return the form on the back cover of this newsletter.

Preservation Racine, Inc.
P.O. Box 383
Racine, WI 53401

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Preservation Racine Membership

Please check the appropriate annual membership category:

☐Life Member $500 ☐Corporate $250 or more ☐Sponsoring $75
☐Contributing $40 ☐Family $25 ☐Individual $15

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____ Email: _____ Phone: _____

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