PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

WINTER 2019
Volume 17

A SEASONAL STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE

One of Preservation Racine's purposes is to study architectural styles of buildings, when they were built, who built them and any interesting anecdote connected to that edifice. Of course, we are committed to the preservation of buildings that help to tell our local story. The Winter Issue of *Preservation Racine News* usually has a seasonal theme, as part of that edition. What better place than this issue to investigate the history of Santa Chalets in Racine?

...It appears that there were three chalets, each with its own architectural character. The **downtown Santa House** was located on Monument Square. It even had a nearby mailbox for children to leave their wish lists for Santa to collect. Sparkly, many-colored Christmas lights were strung overhead, across Main Street, two Salvation Army booths were available for donations, stores not normally open in the evening extended their hours, department store windows were lavishly decorated (of note were the Zahn's Department Store windows) and Christmas music wafted from the speakers attached to light poles along each side of the street.

A November 27, 1963 *Racine Journal Times* display ad read,

Bring your youngsters DOWNTOWN to
Meet Santa at
The SANTA CLAUS Chalet
On Monument Square

Santa will be in residence at the Chalet
with FREE CANDY for his visitors

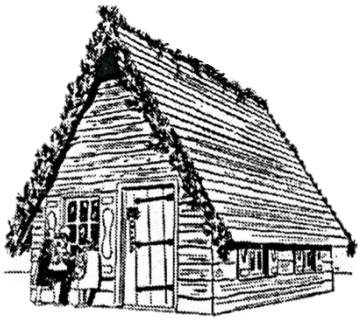
Santa's coming to Downtown Racine to meet and greet all his young friends and get their Christmas Wishes first hand . . . don't miss this opportunity to put Christmas Stars in your youngsters eyes.

Another section explained that one dollar would get a photo of your child with Santa, additional prints were fifty cents. Underneath, the ad went on,

DOWNTOWN IS A CHRISTMAS
WONDERLAND
of Sparkling Lights and Street Decorations . . .
Gaily decorated stores crammed with bright new Christmas Gifts . . . so outstanding they tell their own story of quality and individuality

FREE PARKING ANYWHERE DOWNTOWN EVERY NIGHT AFTER 6 p.m. (except Fridays)

The end of the ad credits The Downtown Association of Racine.



Downtown Santa's chalet, in the square at the foot of the Monument. With thanks to Jim Mercier

Preservation Racine recently heard from Susan Rondeau, a former Racine resident, now living in Tucson Arizona. Her father, Grant Rondeau, was one of the builders ofthe Santa Chalet located on Monument Square during the late 1950s and 1960s. Grant worked at the Architectural Woodworking Division of Veenstra Lumber Company. Her brother remembers that Veenstra had just started a Prefab Housing division and thinks that the chalet might have been a collaboration of the two divisions. We can confirm that it was still there in 1968. Don Ricchio posted a picture of himself and his brother visiting Santa in the Chalet in 1968 on the Facebook page *Retro Racine*.

Downtown Santa's Mailbox, Monument Square
With thanks to Gerry Karwowski

Elmwood Plaza opened in 1956, a new and expansive and multi-stored shopping experience for the Racine area. People still remember the elaborately decorated "Santa's Candy House" parked near Durand Avenue, in front of the plaza. It featured a shingle roof, chimney, two doors surrounded by painted candy canes, and it was decorated with an elephant, two dogs, a panda bear, elf, bell, candlestick and holly.

Santa's Christmas Candy House, Elmwood Plaza
With thanks to Gerry Karwowski

The only surviving Santa House in Racine is located at West Boulevard and Washington Avenue. Santa had a mail box attached to his house ready to receive letters and wish lists. If there was a return address, he would reply until December 15.

On December 21, 2014 *The Journal Times* ran a column called *Glad You Asked,* featuring the following question and answer:

What's the history of Santa's chalet in West Racine?

That little house has been through a lot.

The original chalet was donated by Lowell McNeill, the president of West Racine Bank, in the early 1980s, according to Jim Spangenberg, owner of Johnson's Home Furnishings.

It had been a playhouse at McNeill's home at 2300 Washington Ave., known as the William Horlick Sidley mansion. His daughter Barb Landa, who now lives in Caledonia, remembered that while it was on their property there were signs vagabonds were squatting in the house, which had a working fireplace.

Landa said her father, who grew up on Wright Avenue across the street from her mother, thought the playhouse-turned-chalet would be a great asset for West Racine.

It was set up at Peter Back Park, at the southwest corner of Washington Avenue and West Boulevard. In 1996, it was burned in an arson fire, but firefighters then rebuilt it, complete with electricity.

In 2006 it was moved across the street to its current location in the tiny Dr. Pierce Park.

West Racine Santa House, Dr. Pierce Park, Corner Washington Avenue and West Boulevard. With thanks to Gerry Karwowski

According to a March 2018 obituary, Charles Oliver Chalker was Santa Claus at the West Racine chalet beginning about 1980 and continuing for about thirty years. On September 25, 2017 the Journal Times reported that members of the West Racine Design Group restored and refurbished the Santa chalet.

As with Downtown Racine, West Racine was known for its beautifully decorated store windows, Christmas street decorations and for the West Racine *aebleskiver* breakfasts and bake sales.

Thus, from the late 1950s onwards there have been Santa chalets in and around Racine, and all provided joyful anticipation and fun for generations of young people.

Vivian Merlo

A Premium Collection – Tour Review

It did not seem like the perfect day for the 2019 Preservation Racine Tour of Historic Places. It was gray with off and on rain and drizzle. It was cool … maybe not a good day to stand in line … in a puddle … to view a historic building. But there the people were: gathered under umbrellas, bunched together in their rain hoods, laughing and chatting under the protection of porch roofs … ignoring the clouds and rain drops … they were not going to miss this tour.

At the Tradewell farmhouse on Old Spring Street curious tourgoers asked about the peculiar gadget hanging on the wall … so many people asked that the volunteer tour guide decided to call her friend, the homeowner. And as the next tour group questioned the object, the tour guide had the answer: it was a wild rice shaker. It was used by Native Americans years ago… the woman would sit in the prow of the canoe and as the man moved the boat with a 10 to 16 foot sapling through the dense rice stalks the woman using a cedar stick pulled bunches of stalks over the side of the canoe and with a shorter stick knocked or shook the wild rice grain into the bottom of the canoe. And so … a history lesson and a tour mystery solved.

At the Alvin J. and Anna Hloushek House on Seven Mile Road a young, excited bride who was married the day before the tour told her new husband that even though their wedding had just occurred on Saturday, she "never missed a Preservation Racine tour." And there she was on Sunday with her wedding entourage cheerfully proclaiming her loyalty to the tour and posing in the house with a vintage wedding dress display.

Also at the house on Seven Mile Road was Vitas Hloushek, grandson of the original owners, doing some tour guiding of his own in the red barn on the property. He had been raised in the house, still lives next door and beguiled tour goers with stories about his early days on the farm and living in the house. Vitas also did unsolicited work to make the tour through the property more accessible … he put in a guideline for cars to follow and brought in loads of gravel to smooth the driveway exit.

At the Grace Mayfield House many tour visitors exclaimed they had never been in a round house before … and they were enchanted by the owner's décor and the design of architect Anton Kratochvil. At the Emilius and Martha Enos House on Park Avenue someone remembered their great-aunt had been a friend of former owner Dr. Grace Shenken-burg and had visited her in the office and home many times.

There are always many tour stories. It is never JUST a tour. Sometimes former owners come back to see their old home, children and grandchildren come back to relive good memories. Some people come to view history, some people love buildings and Racine and always want to learn more.

The tour succeeds not just because of the tour goers but also because of the over 150 volunteers. The foremost volunteers are the people who open their houses. Could there be a tour without their generosity? Of course not.

Then there are the researchers who give of their time at libraries, the courthouse, city hall, museums researching the facts and histories so that information is accurate. House captains write the scripts for the buildings and organize the route through of the houses and overseer the tour guides for the entire tour day. Florists are recruited and provide center-pieces for each building. The Tour Guide Committee recruits hundreds of tour guides and had their job made easier this year by the response of so many people willing to cover a tour guide shift or even two. People called and asked to be included. It was phenomenal. At the Hloushek House there were seven students and two of their teachers from the REAL School who volunteered to be tour guides.

They were a help to the organization and it was an educational experience for the students who enjoyed the history and the knowledge of the work of Preservation Racine. Perhaps they will become new members one day?

Additional volunteers organize ticket sales at multiple vendors who volunteer their establishments. Other volunteers sold tickets on the day of the tour.

The First Evangelical Lutheran Church on Villa Street offered their 170-year-old church for the tour and it was at the church where a volunteer provided a fascinating display of "premiums" from by-gone retail stores. Many people recognized the mixing bowls and other articles from their mothers' or grandmothers' kitchens. Remembrances are always special. The church also opened their doors for the hospitality dinner following the tour. The dinner honored building owners and volunteers and was also hosted by Preservation Racine and volunteers.

The success of the tour is solely dependent on the dedication of each and every volunteer. This year's 2019 Preservation Racine, Inc. 43rd Annual Tour of Historic Places, A Premium Collection, was a success because YOU were there … you contributed ... you were a tour goer … or you were a volunteer.

Thank You All!

Our gross income was $11,230.00 with expenses of $3,226.64. The net income was $8,012.36.

Heather Egan

President's letter

This year's Tour of Historic Places was another splendid success! Many hundreds of people toured the buildings on display. As I visited each property and spoke to the house captains, volunteers, and attendees, it became readily apparent that everybody was very happy to see the tour take place after a brief absence. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our members, supporters, and volunteers who coordinated and worked the tour! I am also happy to report that the organization already has plans in place for the 2020 tour, so I hope you will volunteer again next year and help us showcase the beautiful older houses we have in the greater Racine area.

Are you looking for a unique holiday gift? Why not use this season to inspire someone else to become interested in local preservation efforts by sponsoring them for membership? Our members are the people who provide the vitality and support necessary for the annual tour, membership programs, Century Building awards, and an educational newsletter. I encourage you to give a membership to a friend, relative, neighbor, or co-worker this year. It is a great way to make others aware of our local preservation efforts

The support we give to Preservation Racine is support we give towards education and advocacy about preservation-related issues that are ongoing in

buildings in our community and a few more that are currently up for sale that need watchful attention. This organization has been the leader in promoting the preservation of buildings and artifacts in Racine for nearly fifty years. It is a heritage and mission worth preserving. We must continue to publicly advocate to restore and repurpose old buildings, not to destroy and demolish.

This upcoming year will see completion of a few important projects, including signage to commemorate Racine's Camp Utley, and the rebuilding of the back porch to the Blake House, which houses our organization. We will also continue to promote Preservation Racine's fine tradition of hosting its Century Buildings event in May and the Tour of Historic Places in September. These are opportunities for our members and supporters to rally around local preservation activities and get involved.

Finally, elections for board positions will take place this April. I hope you will give consideration to serving on the board or on a committee.

Enjoy the holiday season!

Steven K. Rogstad
President

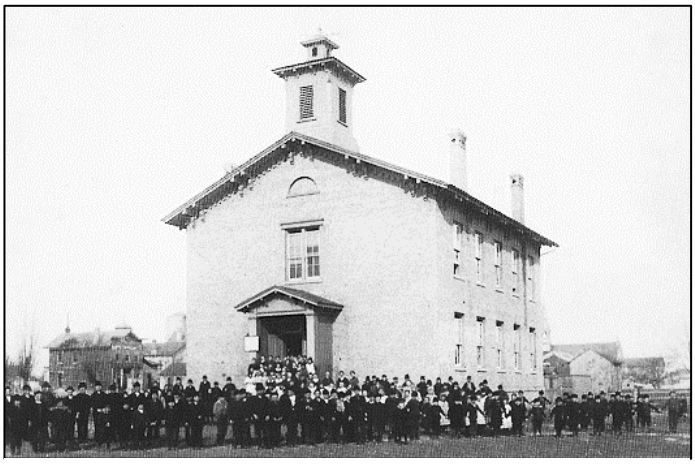
Janes School, 1424 Wisconsin Street

Janes School, 1425 North Wisconsin Avenue, by James Gilbert Chandler and Linus Helm Park (partners), 1869.

On October 9 and November 5, the *Journal Times* reported that some Racine Unified schools may close, and that one of these may well be Janes School.***** This is the moment for heritage-minded people to look ahead. One option is to encourage the school district to keep it open after all. Probably, the children would like this: I know from my own childhood that Janes School is the **only** one in Racine that I would want to attend, because it is so attractive and has that cool round tower. That tower is also architecturally important, as I'll discuss below. Another option is, of course, to find the school a viable new function. This could at least preserve the building. Whatever option we take, we should take it now and we should educate ourselves about the building and its architect as a first step.

The architect of the school as it stands today is well-known by name in Racine. He was James Gilbert Chandler. It is equally well-known that he had a hand in several other schools in Racine, notably those first built by the city's first significant architect, Lucas Bradley. But little else has been brought together – not even a single publication that I could find – and there is so much more to him than this, and Janes school is one of his more interesting buildings.

The early schools in Racine center around Lucas Bradley, who arrived in Racine in 1848 and became one of our movers and shakers. He was immediately elected alderman and school board member, and in



Lucas Bradley's Fourth Ward School, 1855–1897 (razed 1897 when James Gilbert Chandler commissioned for new building)

Chandler & Park, architects: Janes School enlargement. Chandler's original extension of 1883 can be seen at the back (right). To the left, the 1950s addition can be glimpsed. The central section, in an eclectic Romanesque-Italianate style, completely replaced the original building.

1853 he was commissioned by the same school board to design and build Racine High School for $6,500. He built it on the block where the present courthouse now stands, using cream brick and a standard schoolhouse design: minimal Classical Revival with a bell tower at the front and a projecting entrance. By that time, several important Racine professionals had come under his professional aegis. In 1851 Thomas Driver arrived to work for Bradley, becoming his senior foreman in 1855 and effectively taking over the firm for the next twelve years. Meanwhile in 1852, future architect David R. Jones, later designer of the state Capitol, became apprenticed to Bradley.

Just as Driver joined him in 1855, Bradley was commissioned to design three new schools for the Third (future Winslow), Fourth (future Janes) and Fifth (future Garfield) wards. They were all identical: essentially smaller versions of his high school. We have both drawings and photographs of the Fourth Ward School. It opened with four teachers and 200 students in 1856, having been built "inadvertently" according to local historian Gerald Karwowski, on land donated to the city by Lorenzo Janes and intended to form a "North Park" like the East and West Parks that survive today.

In 1880 David R. Jones, who had been teaching at the Madison School of Architecture, opened a branch office in Racine. Keeping things in a close network, he appointed one of his Madison students as head draftsman: James Gilbert Chandler. With the school population growing exponentially, Bradley's buildings were too small by 1883, and it was Chandler who was commissioned to expand them. At the Fourth Ward School that year, he added an extension to the back of Bradley's school that is still in existence.

Chandler acquired an associate in 1892, when Linus Helm Park arrived to work with him, and became his partner in 1896. They had their office on the second

floor of 400 Main Street (until recently the Whey Chai Chinese Restaurant, now closed), which had just been vacated by the Post Office. Chandler had purchased the building from the butcher who used to own it Hugh Gorton. He immediately remodeled it in his greatly favored Richardsonian Romanesque style, and it has features we see on other Chandler buildings such as the Shoop Building (1893) and the future Janes School (1897), such as the use of rusticated red sandstone and the contrast of red and cream brick. As soon as Chandler moved in with his new partner Linus H. Park, the store below was taken by the first of a series of milliners.

In 1897, sixty-four years after he had designed and built the extension for the Fourth Ward School, Chandler was commissioned to tear down Bradley's portion of the school and replace it with something much bigger. His own original extension was retained, and the combined edifice was renamed the Lorenzo Janes School in honor of that eminent Racine pioneer who had "inadvertently" donated the land for it in 1839.

Lydon W. Briggs, Principal of the Fourth Ward School 1867–9 Photograph on his visiting card of that period. With thanks to the Oshkosh Public Museum.

What makes Janes School so special as a building and within Chandler's deplorably little-known oeuvre? Firstly, it has several representative features.

The materials and style have just been mentioned, and like the many schools in various states that he had designed in the interim, it has a square footprint to facilitate setting the classrooms against the window walls and placing a central stairway or corridor lit from above by a great skylight. The monumental entryway and steep gables containing Palladian windows are also characteristic. Uniquely at Janes School, however, instead of his usual central square bell tower, Chandler placed a fabulous round tower at one corner. His main entrance was at the base of this tower and could therefore overlook both North Main Street and Barker Street. Perhaps more important, the teacher on playground duty could stand in that doorway and see the entire playground!

Inside, the entrance is, of course, a circular hallway, and above it there is a circular niche in one of the classrooms. The floor above that is not used, which seems likely to have deprived the children of a highly desirable area. Chandler also added pressed-tin ceilings that don't appear (or perhaps do not survive) in the three other Bradley schools that Chandler also extended at about this time.

Apart from the addition of a 1950s classroom extension that scars the western façade of Chandler's work, the school remains in good condition from the outside, and it has been reported that the School Board has recently expended a great deal of money on its interior. It would seem a pity to waste such a historical and attractive investment, no?

A beloved Principal of Janes School, L. W. Briggs (1867–1869, afterwards principal of the brand new 6th Ward School, 1870–1872), is remembered impressing on his pupils' minds (their words), *Do right because it is right*. Let us do right by this lovely building so full of ,character, local history, and high values. **(See update next page)**

UPDATE ON JANES SCHOOL

As we go to press, the *Journal Times* reports that Janes School is one of those evaluated as in "worst" shape for continued use. This apparently is in spite of the very large sums invested in it just five years ago. Note also that the *Journal Times* continues to give an incorrect date for Janes School. **The correct dates are these**: in 1855 Lucas Bradley designed the Fourth Ward School; in 1883 James Chandler was commissioned to enlarge it with an extension to the back, which is still in existence; and in 1897 Chandler was commissioned to tear down Bradley's building and replace it with the present fairy-tale castle. At that point, the school was named in honor of Lorenzo Janes. Chandler is one of Racine's most significant historic architects and Janes School is one of his most perfect and special works.

Pippin Michelli

Racine Heritage Building
1445 Junction Avenue

1445 Junction Avenue, Racine, 1897

When we choose a Heritage Building for the newsletter it is based on several factors. It may be a unique architectural style for Racine, like the Federalist style double house at 504 Park Avenue, or it was built by a locally historic person such as the Sidney Sage house at 920 Wilson Street or the Karel Jonas house at 1337 Erie Street. But one thing they all have in common is their vulnerability to further deterioration/neglect and even demolition. This edition's building at 1445 Junction Avenue is definitely vulnerable, but it was a total mystery to me, and my research was repaid with a personal treasure.

The house is a handsome cream brick Italianate style, one of my favorites, with an exterior in remarkably good condition for being boarded up and vacant for years and abutting the railroad tracks for over 120 years! There are gabled pediments on all four sides of the rather steep hipped roof and the symmetrically placed windows are hooded with rectangular stone crowns. It stands in Herrick's subdivision, Lot 8, Block 77 of the School Section. The land was sold for $213 in July 1890 to William and Carrie Scholtz, by Henry Mitchell acting as guardian for the minor son of Charles Herrick, Charles B. Herrick. The house was built as a boardinghouse in 1897; however, the Scholtzes first had a frame boardinghouse and restaurant on the site according to the 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. William Scholtz died in 1894 and Carrie married Orton Shaver in December of 1897. The 1900 Federal Census lists Orton and Carrie Shaver living in the house with two servants and seven boarders; there was not a property transfer recorded until Carrie Shaver sold the house on March 30, 1905 for $5,500 to Niels and Carrie Pederson.

The Shavers added a restaurant in 1902 and were living offsite at various Washington Avenue locations for the next few years, so it seems the boardinghouse was becoming more of a hotel and serving railroad travelers. The Pedersons continued the restaurant and resided in the building with their three children and a servant. They sold the building to Hans C. and Marie Hansen in January 1913 who

sold it almost exactly one year later to Henry and Gertrude Erdmann.

The 1914 city directory listed it as the Union Hotel. They continued to run the hotel until Henry died in 1921. Gertrude ran the hotel alone until she sold it to Racine Tool & Machine Company in 1929. It was vacant for a few years until Vernon and Sadie Vrooman rented the building in about 1934. They resided there with their three sons and ran a boardinghouse with up to nine boarders. The building was purchased in 1946 by Joseph, William and Max Seft, the Seft Brothers Partnership. Various people ran the boardinghouse until it became vacant again in 1954.

According to city directories, in 1955 Racine County Social Services had their offices there. In 1969 it was called the County Department of General Assistance, and by 1978 renamed to Racine County Department of Human Services. The building was vacant in 1979, occupied by Society's Assets in 1980 and 1981 and vacant again in 1982. As the Seft brothers died during the 1970s ownership passed to surviving brothers until First Wisconsin Bank, and eventually realtor James Dickert owned it.

A Journal Times newspaper story in December 1988 mentioned the building being occupied by the High Riders motorcycle club in the late 1970s. All Fastener Manufacturing used the building as a warehouse from 1985 to 1988. In December 1988 Sister Lois Aceto tried to reopen the building as a boardinghouse for homeless men. James Dickert was going to donate the building to Hesed House, Aceto's nonprofit for that purpose, but it never came to fruition due to neighborhood businesses opposition to it. The city directories listed it as vacant from 1989 to 1998 when the address was dropped completely. It is hoped that the redevelopment of the former Ajax manufacturing property will bring a renewal to 1445 and all of Junction Avenue and Uptown Racine.

So where is the treasure? Hans C. and Marie Hansen were my great grandparents! My family knew they had lived by the railroad tracks, but not where or exactly when. They were living in and running a boardinghouse on Blake Avenue in 1910 and bought the boardinghouse at 1445 Junction Avenue on January 9, 1913. My grandfather told stories that he and his four brothers played on the tracks and jumped on and off of moving railroad cars! The youngest, preschool aged, was forbidden to do this, but he followed the older boys. One day he fell under a train and lost his leg. My grandfather was only two years older but was supposed to be watching him. His father beat him nearly to death in what was probably an alcohol-fueled rage of anger and grief; nearby men pulled him off and saved my grandfather's life. The Hansens sold the boarding-house on January 8, 1914 and moved to Montana with money received from the accident. They bought the Brush Lake Resort and had an infant daughter, but on August 21, 1915 both Hans and Marie were drowned in another probably alcohol-infused, rage that resulted in a boating incident on the lake. The six Hansen siblings were orphans.

Debbie Yale

The Sunflower Pavilion at River Bend

In 1962 a six-sided park shelter designed by the well-known architect John Randal McDonald was built at River Bend Nature Center in Caledonia. The open-air pavilion had a triangular Lannonstone fireplace and an expansive roof with long, geometrically-radiating roof beams which extended to a few supporting metal columns. The intricate pattern of the underside of the roof inspired the structure's nickname of "Sunflower Pavilion".

John Randal McDonald (1922-2003) was a creative and sometimes flamboyant Wisconsin architect who designed everything from houses to public buildings, churches, and other structures worldwide. He has been compared to Frank Lloyd Wright in his emphasis on nature, including the importance of a natural setting and the use of natural materials. He reportedly planned over 100 projects in Wisconsin, of which nearly 70 were actually constructed, and about 90% of them apparently still exist today. Although born and raised in Milwaukee, he wanted to be known as "Racine's architect" as he started his

career here, building a number of homes in Racine and living in two of them himself.

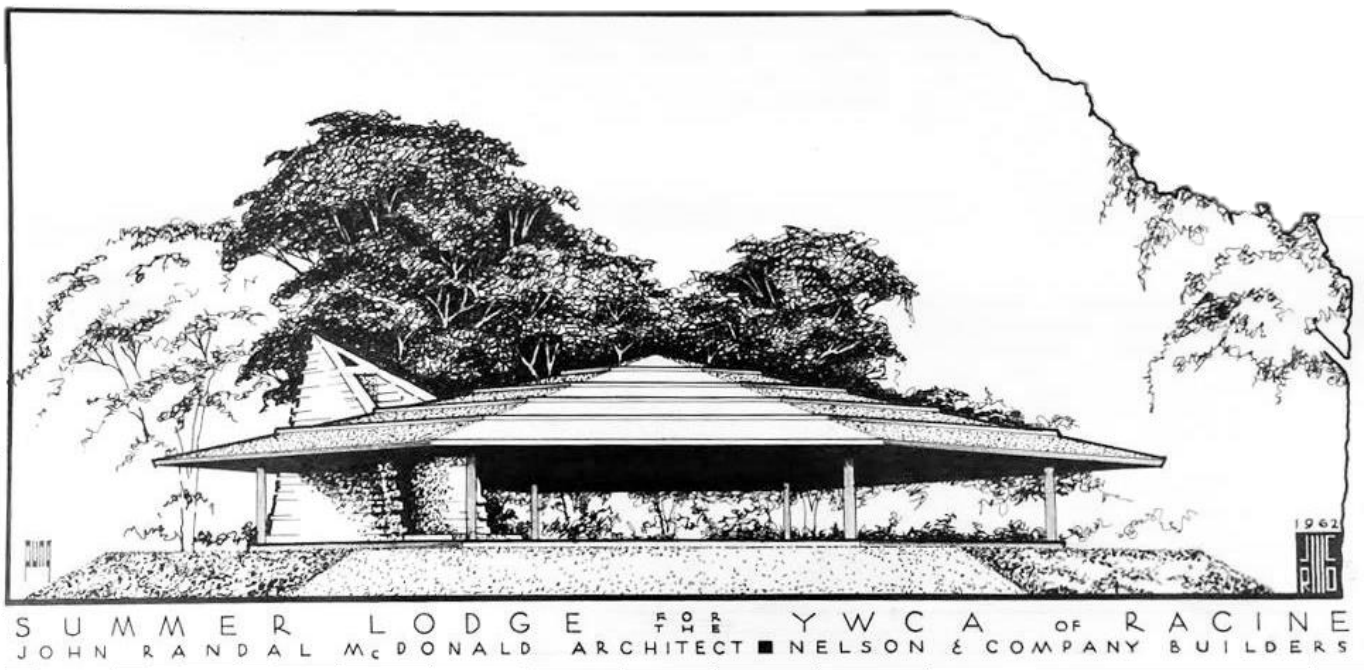
Support for the 1962 Sunflower Pavilion had been provided at the time by the YWCA (which owned the property), the John W. Hammes Foundation, and other leaders in Racine's business and manufacturing community, with Nelson Construction as the contractor. By 2014 the pavilion, located in a low-lying area below the Root River bluff, was over 50 years old and in need of repairs; as a result, it was slated for demolition by Racine County, which had acquired the property. With a generous donation from longtime local nature-lover Imogene Johnson, a new pavilion was built closer to the River Bend lodge and dedicated to Sam and Gene Johnson in 2015. Fortunately, however, the county agreed to delay any action on razing the old pavilion while a plan to restore it was being considered by architects, preservationists, John Randal McDonald fans, and others.

Interior of the Sunflower Pavilion, showing John Randal MacDonald's radiating rafters that gave the pavilion its name and his oblique fireplace.

Current state of the Sunflower Pavilion rafters

River Bend Nature Center, Inc., the nonprofit organization which manages the property and its educational and environmental programs, is still considering retaining and restoring the Sunflower Pavilion for use by day campers, hikers, cross-country skiers, and other visitors. The stone fireplace and the concrete floor and tables are still in reasonable or repairable condition. The main concern is the condition of the leaking roof, including its deteriorating exposed rafter tails. The River Bend board and staff would like to pursue possible grants or other funding for the project, especially in partnership with other local preservationist groups and individuals. Stay tuned for further developments.

Janet Carter



Coming Up

Monday, December 2, 2019 – 7:00 pm
The Racine Yacht Club
1 Barker Street, Racine
Rochelle Pennington presents, The Endurance

January – No Membership Meeting

Monday, February 3, 2020 – 7:00 pm
Tim Mutterer, American Historical Speaker
Presidential Romances … Lincoln and Truman
Location to be Announced

Correction

In our previous issue we had a mistake in the caption to a photograph of the big Sage House, shown on the front page and page 2: As the text correctly stated, the house was the **Sidney Sage house**.

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.
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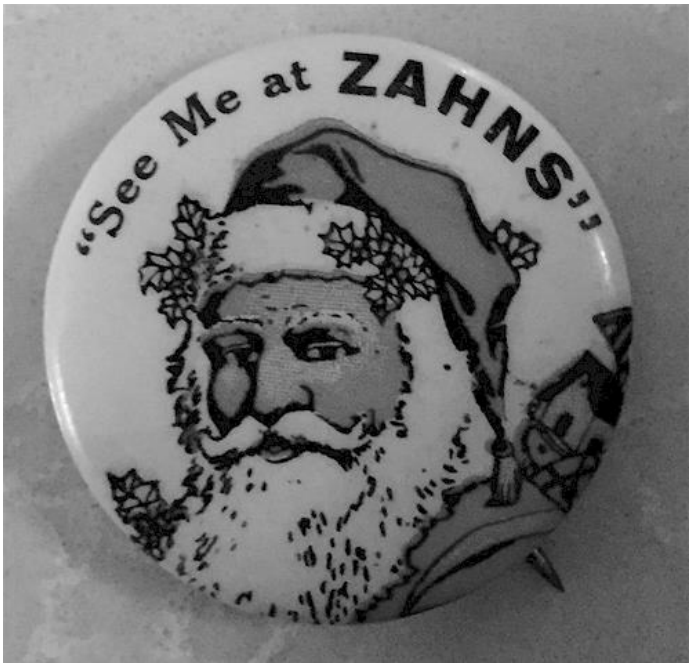

With Seasonal Greetings and thanks to Gerry Karwowski and Jim Mercier for the Santa pin (left) and Grants Furniture ad (right)