PRESERVATION
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REMEMBERING OUR OLD CHRISTMAS TREE LOTS

It may be safe to assume that many Preservation Racine "senior" members have fond memories of the small neighborhood grocery stores, meat markets, bakeries, dime stores, and many other "mom & pop" businesses that once dotted our neighborhoods many years ago. Another business that fits into this category was the many Christmas tree lots that sprung up overnight, after Thanksgiving, at so many locations throughout the city, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. Granted, this was a seasonal entrepreneurial venture (usually lasting less than a month), but it seemed that Christmas just wasn't complete until the whole family ventured out into the cold to purchase the perfect evergreen tree to haul home and decorate in their living rooms.

Christmas tree lots in the United States can be traced back to the mid-1800s, when a farmer from the Catskill Mountains brought some trees to New York City to sell, thus opening up the first Christmas tree lot in the nation.

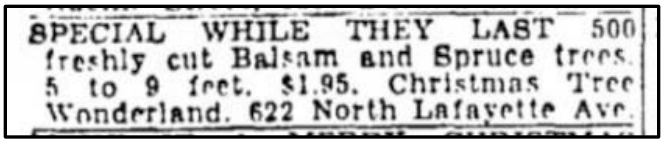
Advertising images courtesy of Jim Mercier.

The custom of celebrating the Christmas season with a decorated evergreen tree came with people moving from the eastern United States, as well as nineteenth century immigration to Wisconsin. Prior to tree lots, families ventured out into local wooded areas to harvest their own perfect tree.

It is unknown when Racine's first Christmas tree lot opened, but rest assured the idea really caught on. By the 1920s, Christmas tree lots began popping up throughout Racine and surrounding communities. By the 1950s and 1960s, tree lots seemed to be everywhere, including gas stations, empty lots and so many other "mom and pop" businesses scattered around Racine. Tony Merlo remembers the lots in the neighborhood where he grew up. Nick Longo operated a Christmas tree lot on the corner of Charles and Lombard Streets, Marshall Garbo sold trees at 3016 Douglas Avenue, near the corner of Douglas and Melvin Avenues and Sam Farina sold his trees at 3062 Douglas Avenue. Nick Longo's son, John, continued selling trees until recently at his business location just down the street from Nick's original site on Douglas Avenue. Tony says there was great excitement when the trucks laden with trees arrived to deliver their bounty. Sharon Baldukas and Vivian Merlo remember their great uncle Jack Kanyuh bringing Christmas trees harvested in upper Michigan after Thanksgiving and selling them behind his house on the corner of Marquette Street and Nelson Court. There was always a small Christmas tree for the Baldukas children to decorate with homemade ornaments and paper chains for their bedroom. Even service organizations were selling trees, including churches, Boy Scouts, and other groups. In addition, retailers such as Goldblatts, Coryelle's, Milaeger's, the Optimists and many more were known for selling trees on a yearly basis. One of the

largest and best-known lots was "Christmas Tree Wonderland," which was located on Lafayette Avenue (now Memorial Drive), just south of State Street. Besides having a huge selection of trees, they also offered "flocked" trees (as did a few other businesses). Flocking gave your tree that "covered with snow" look by spraying a white mixture on the tree branches.

Who else remembers hearing the crunch of snow under winter boots, smelling smoke from a burning barrel, sometime Christmas music playing and the wonderful aroma of evergreen?


SPECIAL WHILE THEY LAST 500 freshly cut Balsam and Spruce trees. 5 to 9 feet. $1.95. Christmas Tree Wonderland. 622 North Lafayette Ave.

As a side note ... who remembers the aluminum Christmas trees from the 1950s and 1960s? Although they were not green in color, they proved to be very popular in the United States from 1958 until around 1967. Did you know that most of them were made in Manitowoc, Wisconsin from 1959 to 1969? To add a splash of color, many of these sparkly trees came with a revolving color wheel placed at the base of the tree to add magic to the display. Although not in demand anymore, aluminum trees are highly-prized by collectors.

Happy holidays!

Jim Mercier & Vivian Merlo

Made in Racine - Johnson's Electric Floor Polishers

This article involves TWO companies with Racine roots and how they collaborated to market a labor-saving device that benefited both firms (one of them is still here). And, as you can easily determine by the title, that product was the electric floor polisher. Considering how cumbersome it was to polish floors before the invention of the fractional horsepower motor, electric floor polishers joined the many other products that revolutionized life as we know it. So, my fellow historians, are you ready to soak up a little local history?

But first, a little background information about the first company in our story. As some of you know, S. C. Johnson was originally involved in the manufacture of parquet flooring. However, as more and more customers began to write the company for ways to take care of these floors, Johnson recommended a paste wax, which he knew protected many European floors for centuries. Before long, the company was producing paste wax in order to satisfy the demand for maintaining wooden floors. They even expanded their line of floor-care products to include wood fillers, dyes, cleaning products, varnishes, weighted brushes, and even automobile-care products.

I know what some of you are thinking...what are weighted brushes, and what would they be used for? Well, after applying a liquid or paste wax on your floor, it had to be polished in order to bring out that beautiful shine. Using a polishing cloth while on your hands and knees was the current method used by hired help or the homeowner. Enter the weighted brush. Johnson promoted his brush by stating, "no more stooping, kneeling, or soiling of hands. Use like a carpet sweeper, pushing backward and forward over the floor. It has a long handle with a weight and attached brush. Our brushes are made in two sizes, a 25 pound and a 15-pound size, lessening the labor of polishing the floor. The Johnson's Weighted Floor Polishing Brush is just the thing for woman's uses." How times have changed! As a side note, I did experiment with one that I have, and unless you have the same physique as some of the weight-lifters I see at the gym, I wouldn't recommend this "exercise" to anyone for any length of time!

Apparently, Herbert Fisk Johnson, Sr. (son of S. C. Johnson) felt the same way. In 1926, he commissioned a neighbor of his to design and build an ELECTRIC home floor polisher. Now, this wasn't just ANY neighbor, but

none other than Chester Beach, the inventive genius who is credited with developing the fractional horsepower motor. Louis Hamilton and Chester Beach both worked for the United States Standard Electric Works, founded in Racine by Frederick Osius in 1904. In 1910, Osius formed a new company to market a line of products centered around Beach's innovation. Osius reportedly paid both Hamilton and Beach $1000 each for the use of their names in his new company. By 1913, both Hamilton and Beach sold their interests in the firm, and started their own company ... the Wisconsin Electric Company. The company later adopted its trade name of "Dumore" and officially changed their name to The Dumore Company.

That being said, Chester Beach accepted the challenge, and developed an electric floor polisher for Johnson's Wax. This proved to be a very successful arrangement for both companies for many years. However, this was not the first time that local firms collaborated with each other. Other examples would include Hamilton Beach manufacturing drink mixers and malted milk dispensers for Horlick's Malted Milk, and Dumore, who also supplied electric drink mixers to Horlick's.

S. C. Johnson originally marketed these electric floor polishers as rental units only, charging $2.00 per day at local hardware, furniture and "paint and wallpaper" stores. Due to their popularity, Johnson's eventually made them available to purchase for $42.50 (although they did go on sale occasionally, as seen in the ad). The Johnson polisher displayed their own label, which only stated "The Johnson's Wax Electric Floor Polisher", with no mention of Dumore being the manufacturer. The Dumore Company, however, did make a line of floor polishers with their own "Floormaid" brand, which was sold through Sears Roebuck & Co.

Of course, Johnson's "Proper Treatment for Floors" booklets glorified the benefits of using an electric polisher. A good example would be, "The Johnson's Wax Electric Floor Polisher takes all the work out of keeping floors beautiful. It polishes wax on all floors to a wear-resisting luster that is hard to mar and easy to clean. A child can do it. Quiet and powerful, it costs less than one and a half cents an hour, and weighs only 9 pounds. It will save you hours of effort, and will give you floors that make a perfect background for your rugs and furniture." This would have been a welcome new product for those using a weighted brush!
However, improved floor finishes, including poly-urethane, kept floors appealing without the use of wax beginning in the 1930s. Later, inexpensive carpeting became available after World War II, further reducing the demand for hardwood flooring (and thus, polishers). Although the sale of hardwood flooring has increased since the 1980s, pre-finished wood and other "no-wax" flooring are now the norm.

S. C. Johnson is still going strong, while Dumore left Racine for Mauston in 1991. However, if you look closely, you can still see their name painted on the side of their old factory near 17th and Racine Streets, a silent reminder of the days when this "labor saving device" was made there.

Jim Mercier

Oh Where Oh Where Have the Lions Gone?

In the last Preservation Racine Newsletter Mary Whitman wrote a loving memorial tribute about Jim Fiene, citing the many accomplishments he achieved for Preservation Racine. Soon after I began receiving donations with the caveat that the money be used in some manner to honor Jim at the Blake House where he had spent many years “babysitting” the historic house.

In answer to the question of how to honor the Fienes, the idea was hatched to acquire the lions that adorned the sides of their red brick walkway approaching their front door. The lions faced each other on opposite sides of the walk and were nestled between quadrants of the beautifully clipped boxwood knot garden. George Mangold, longtime Preservation Racine member and

longtime neighbor and friend of Jim and Roberta Fiene came forward to purchase the lions to be installed at the front walk of the Blake House.

These lions have a history which Jim and Roberta recounted in Gary Metro's September 19, 1997 article, "Guardians Cast An Historic Gaze" in *The Journal Times*. The hollow, cast iron lions have no foundry marks or date imprinted on them, but the Fienes reported seeing a near match (this one dozing) near the front entrance to River-view, the estate of Colonel Charles McClaren built in Columbus, Mississippi in 1852.

Image Credits: Xanthi Merlo

The first known Racine home for these unnamed lions was 703 Lake Avenue. According to the newspaper article, Walter Wright, a thought the lions were purchased by his maternal grandmother the late 1800s. The 1897 Racine City Directory indicates that Walter F. and Louise Deacon resided at 703 Lake Avenue. By 1914 Clarence H. Wright, Secretary and Treasurer of Racine Auto Tire and Louise Deacon, widow of Walter, are listed living at that address. The Lake Avenue house was eventually razed to build The Racine Public Library. In 1929 the lions moved with the Clarence and Jessie Wright family to a new home on the corner of Lighthouse Drive and Vincennes Circle in North Bay. Clarence is listed as president of Wight Rubber Products. The Wright family moved to 1730 Wisconsin Avenue in the mid-1940s. The lions came along. Walter Wright became part of Wright and Wishau Construction and took his lions with him, first to their initial, small shop and office, and then in 1973 to their more modern shop at 5825 Douglas Avenue. This is when Mr. Wright attached the lions to concrete slabs and bolted them down. About one year later, Mr. Wright came to work to find one of the lions missing, only to hear from the Caledonia Police Department, that the lion was found in a nearby yard and returned.

It was at this time, that Jim and Roberta had the opportunity to purchase the lions and give them a new home in their beautiful backyard garden on a bluff above Lake Michigan located in Racine's Historic Southside District. In 1992 the lions were moved to the front yard to greet guests and passersby. At Christmas time, a wreath made of pine boughs and decorated with a big red bow adorned their necks.

The lions are now installed at the Blake House as a perfect tribute to the Fienes. So many of our stories are woven together. George Mangold's great aunt Carrie was the granddaughter of Lucius Blake. George helped his friends begin their business, Flowers and Company, in the Blake House. George designed the first arrangements for that Business in the basement and it was George who traditionally made the Christmas wreaths for the lions.

We are so grateful to George Mangold for providing the funds to purchase the lions. We are grateful to Sarah and Jim Anspaugh of Meyers Monument for moving and installing the lions at Blake House. It was discovered when the lions were lifted for the move, a 10-12-inch chain attached to a brick was fastened to the base, making it difficult for someone to pilfer them. Thank you to the Anspaughs for the granite base supporting the bronze marker, Paul Zens for wire brushing and priming the lions with a rust preventing coating, as well as Tony Merlo for painting and giving the lions a fresh look. Thank you to Heather Egan, Tony and Vivian Merlo, Pat Murphy, Rita Tomkiewicz, Mary Whitman and Paul Zens for providing funds to cover the costs of the bronze marker, painting and spring plantings.

Please stop by to meet the lions. They are never dozing and are looking in two different directions to watch those coming and going to the Blake House.

Vivian Merlo

Lincoln Among the Badgers, a new book by Steven K. Rogstad

Press Release, Millhouse Press

We are very pleased to announce that our past president, Steven Rogstad, has published his book on President Lincoln, under the auspices of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center (Millhouse Press). It has had some excellent reviews and we reproduce what the publishing company has said about it.

This study represents the first scholarly treatment of the visits Abraham and Mary Lincoln made to the Badger State. Although they collectively visited Wisconsin five times, they traveled into the state at different times and never together. Abraham Lincoln entered the state's borders for the first time in 1832 during his military service in the Black Hawk War, returning in 1859 to make speeches in Milwaukee, Beloit, and Janesville. Mary toured northern Wisconsin and Racine in 1867, returning five years later to visit Waukesha.

Aside from the visits, Wisconsin has a myriad of unique and unusual monuments, memorials, and markers which honor the Lincolns. Most of them are concentrated in southern Wisconsin, although some unusual tributes can be found in the North Woods region. The monuments in the book have their own distinctive and sometimes bizarre history, including donors who died prematurely, a sculptor who demolished his statue with an axe, a statue with a plaque that misidentifies its creator, and a Will that was contested all the way to the Wisconsin Supreme Court to prevent funds from being used to create a Lincoln monument. Also included are stories of five Wisconsinites who knew the Lincolns or were connected in some way with the president's assassination or elaborate funeral pageant.

The accounts about the Lincolns in Wisconsin, and the histories of their monuments, have never been collected in a single volume. Highly illustrated, including maps, this book will appeal to historians, travelers, tourists, families, scholars, and history lovers.

Steven K. Rogstad is a Racine, Wisconsin, native, who is known nationally for his scholarship in Lincoln studies. He has served as Secretary & Editor for the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, and Review Editor for the Lincoln Herald (Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN). In 2008, he was appointed Secretary of the Wisconsin Lincoln Bicentennial Commission by Governor Jim Doyle, and served on the commission's Markers & Memorials Committee. He has edited and introduced several volumes, authored numerous articles and reviews, coordinated restoration projects for Lincoln statuary in Wisconsin, and delivered dedicatory addresses for Lincoln monuments in Racine and Burlington. He is the former board chair for Racine Heritage Museum, and past board president for Preservation Racine.

Contact publisher at www.schrc.org or the author at steverogstad@schrc.org for more information about the book, ordering, and book signings.

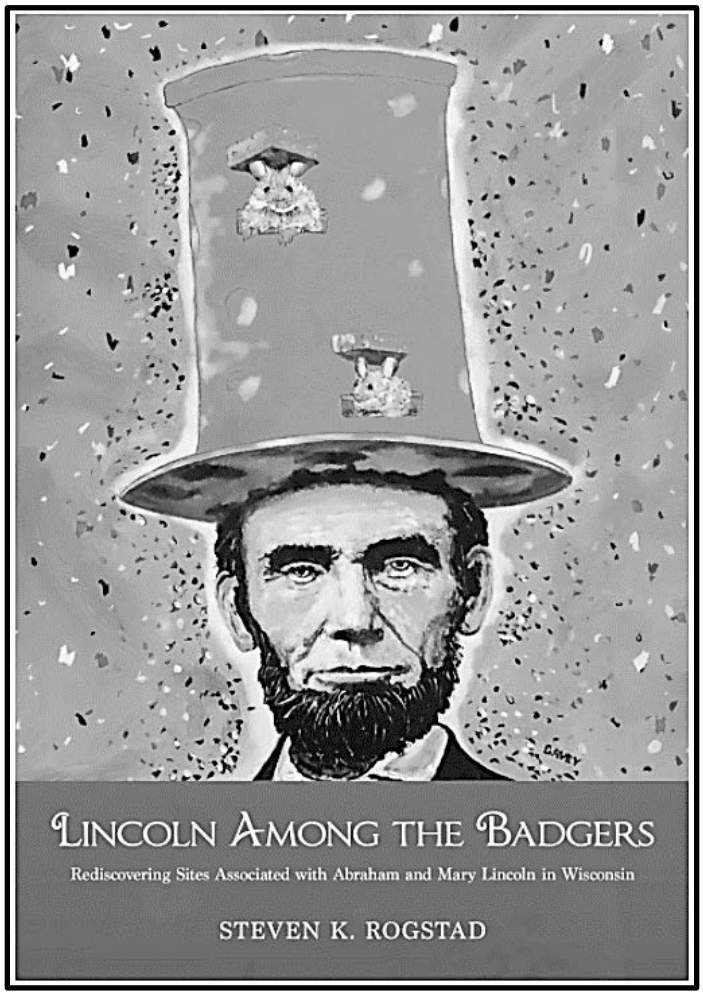


Image credit: Millhouse Press, Sheboygan County Historical Research Center

A Heritage Building

In 2020, walls tumbled down and then new ones were erected on Block 84 of the Blake & Fish subdivision in the School Section of the city of Racine. The block, bordered by Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets to the north and south, with Clark Street to the east and Junction Avenue to the west, had been mostly occupied by Walker Manufacturing Company—Ajax Plant. Now only one original building remains in the southeast corner of Block 84, at 1300 Sixteenth Street. It was never part of the industrial complex and has gone by many names with many owners, but it has been long recognized as the Pabst Saloon or Pabst Beer Castle since it was built at the turn of the last century.

Image credit: Debbie Yale

In the 1800s, brewers would sell or lease saloon fixtures to help guarantee a saloon's loyalty. A large cash investment was required to build, outfit and furnish a new enterprise, so brewers started financing new saloons in exchange for an exclusivity agreement. This ultimately resulted in direct brewery ownership of saloons which were called "tied houses." Breweries would purchase or rent saloons and then lease them to saloonkeepers, retaining the power to set beer prices in an exclusive agreement. By the early 1880s, Pabst was buying saloons in Milwaukee and had begun to do so throughout the Midwest. From 1890 to 1905 Pabst purchased land and built their own tied houses. By 1898 Pabst's tied houses numbered in the thousands. By 1909 the brewing industry had invested about $70 million in the purchase of saloon properties, and controlled 85% of the saloons in America.

Tied houses had unique architectural features that would identify them. They were built in both commercial areas and residential neighborhoods, especially ethnic ones. Pabst-built tied houses typically were rectangular, two story with a three story tower, made usually of cream brick, and were very attractive castle-like buildings. This style was a miniature version of the massive twenty-one acre Pabst Brewery complex in Milwaukee, and stood as an architectural advertisement for the company.

Our Pabst tied house was built at the height of the brewery's expansion and is a relatively rare, unaltered example. It is a handsome Gothic Revival made of cream brick; the tower is designed like a castle battlement with Gothic pointed-arched windows, crenelated parapets, corbeled cornices and a bartizan. Mini-buttresses are found along the walls as is an ornamental banding at the roof line. There are segmented arched windows with raised hood molds and dripstone lintels, and a corner double-arched entryway. Further adornments of four small stone shields over each side of the entryway adds to the fortress/castle-like appearance. Two large glazed terra cotta medallion signs with the Pabst Brewery logo are just below the pointed-arched windows of the tower. The center of the medallion has hops leaves and the letter B which stands for Best, the original name of the brewery. Jacob Best was Captain Frederick Pabst's father-in-law. Pabst Brewery's German-born architect, Otto Strack, is believed to have been the architect.

The exact age of the Pabst Saloon is a little murky. It is known that Pabst Brewing Company purchased Lots 35, 40 and 42 of Block 84 on October 24, 1890 for $3000. The saloon is on the East 30 feet of the three lots. However, no structure appears at 1300 Sixteenth Street in city directories until the 1901/02 edition. A Journal Times article from January 10, 1981 states the saloon was built

in 1899 and leased to saloonkeeper Peter Kersten until his death in 1902. Other sources claim it was built in 1901 or opened in 1901. There was a saloon listed at 1302 Sixteenth Street from 1894 to 1899, which would have been on the West 70 feet of the lots purchased by Pabst. Further research may clear this up, but I speculate Pabst may have operated an existing saloon next to the property where they were to build one of their signature castles.

Other known dates are for the sale of the west portion of the property on October 20, 1919 to William Carpenter. The saloon, on the east portion, was sold to Pabst Realty Company on December 21, 1920; it was then sold to Ventnor Corporation of Milwaukee on December 29, 1921. Ventnor sold it to a private individual on July 3, 1923; it has been sold numerous times since then. The Eighteenth Amendment prohibiting the sale, manufacture and distribution of alcohol had been ratified in January 1919 sending both breweries and saloons reeling. Prohibition was repealed in 1933, but the Volstead Act was also passed which made it illegal for breweries to own retail establishments, thus ending the tied house arrangement. Breweries were now required to sell beer through distributors who would sell to saloons and taverns.

Although Racine's Pabst Beer Castle was no longer owned by Pabst and no longer sold beer, it remained open during Prohibition selling soft drinks. Jacob Balamut was an immigrant from the Ukraine, who came to Racine about 1920. He lived with his brother-in-law Josef Povidalo, the owner of the saloon and according to city directories lived above the saloon until his death in 1972 at age 78. Balamut's connection to the saloon lasted over 50 years; he inherited the saloon from his brother-in-law and ran it as JB Tavern for 30 years. The Saloon has also been known as: Pop's Place, Columbow's Place, Clover Club, Salt & Pepper, Old School Way, and King Daddies II.

As mentioned in the first paragraph, new walls have been going up on Block 84. Cardinal Capital Management, Inc. and the City are hoping to revitalize the Uptown neighborhood with a $30 million multi-family development. Cardinal was the third developer to investigate the Ajax site, but the only one whose plans are coming to fruition. It was first hoped some of the Ajax buildings could be rehabilitated, but they had to be demolished. Two, 4 story apartment buildings are being built; the first is an 87 unit market-rate building, the second is an affordable (partially funded by low-income-housing tax credits) 54 unit apartment building. It is very exciting that Cardinal has also purchased the historic saloon property. It is currently being used for on-site construction management. When construction is complete it will be used as an on-site apartment management office, have a community room, and be a new site for a Racine Police Department Community Oriented Policing, or COP, house.

The Pabst Beer Castle is perhaps not quite so majestic as it once was, with a four-story apartment building looming next to it. The bar is gone, but the back bar remains; the unaltered exterior is still an eye-catching architectural landmark, and the well-maintained interior, including the upper flats, speak well of its history. The future of this handsome Gothic Revival appears bright, useful and secure. It could have not been so; thank you to Cardinal Capital Management, Inc., and the City of Racine.

Debbie Yale

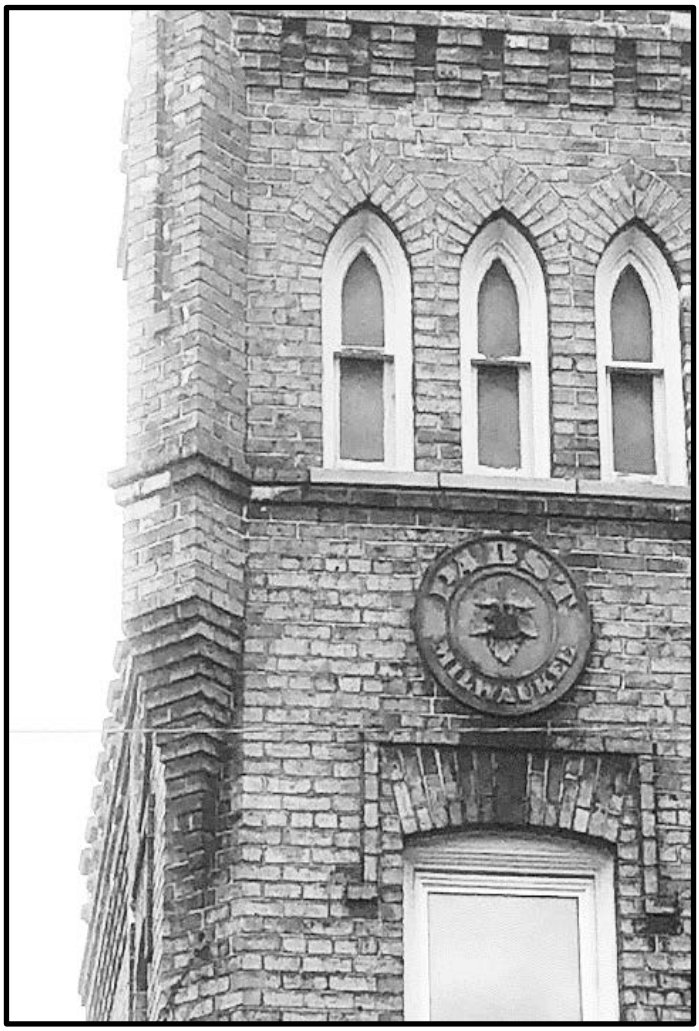


Image credit: Debbie Yale

College Avenue Brick Intersection Restored

Image Credits: Jan Carter

In addition to other happenings near the east end of 16th Street in Racine (see the article about the former Pabst tavern), we have some exciting news about the intersection of 16th Street and College Avenue.

The brick portion of College Avenue, five blocks between 14th Street and DeKoven Avenue, has long been a source of historical pride, not only for the residents who live there and for the entire City (which has only a few other remnants of brick streets), but also for all of Racine County. The red brick road, which was laid in 1897, is often photographed and touted in news articles and tourism materials as a local historical asset. Several years ago, planning for the continuing reconstruction of 16th Street reached the stretch from Racine Street eastward to its terminus at Main Street at the lakefront. Suddenly there was considerable interest in the intersection where College Avenue crosses 16th Street—where the existing original red bricks had long been covered with asphalt, but were in poor condition.

The project's official local kickoff began in 2017, with the engineering and design project managers from GRAEF presenting preliminary design work at several public involvement meetings in 2017 and 2018. Certain historic resources had already been identified, including the S. C. Johnson & Son Administration Building and the nearby Research Tower, both Frank Lloyd Wright designs, and the Southside Historic District. Public input from the community meetings was evaluated, and eventually a plan was developed for the 16th and College intersection, in keeping with its historic location.

For many of us, 16th Street is a major route across town, but officially it's classified as a minor arterial and is not a federally-designated truck route. It's half industrial and business (S. C. Johnson & Son and one convenience store/laundromat) and half residential, and in 2014 the average traffic count there was near 5000 vehicles per day. Early on, there had been a proposal to replace the buried brickwork at the College Avenue intersection with concrete like the rest of 16th Street, in order to better withstand the traffic. Luckily, however, local residents, businesses, preservationists, and government officials eventually agreed on a plan to restore the brick intersection to its former splendor.

The first signs of construction began in 2018 with surveying and marking of temporary easements. Such access was needed to ultimately remove, regrade, and match adjacent driveway aprons with the new street level, including new curb and gutter, and to install ADA-compliant accessible curb ramps at all intersections. No relocation of residences or businesses was required, although access along these blocks was minimal to nonexistent for many months this past summer and fall. Except for some sidewalk repairs and a few replacement slabs, however, the existing sidewalks remained in place. Little by little, deep excavations were made in the street for new underground storm water culverts. Then new curb and gutter appeared, and finally new concrete pavement was poured, with a five foot wide bike lane marked in both directions.

At the College Avenue intersection and other cross streets along 16th Street which still have brick underneath the asphalt, old bricks were unearthed and piled up for removal and reuse. While the other intersections were reconstructed with a continuation of the concrete roadway, the intersection of 16th Street and College Avenue received special treatment. Instead of the original technique of just laying the bricks directly on the ground (which in that area is generally a foot or two of dirt atop the sands of ancient shoreline dunes), foundation work was done to compact the ground before a cement base with intermittent drainage pipes was poured. Finally, a special bricklaying crew laid salvaged bricks atop a traffic-bond type layer in a traditional crisscross pattern, nearly duplicating the existing intersection at 15th and College.

The pedestrian crosswalks at College Avenue did involve removing the street bricks in favor of concrete paving, but it was sensitively done. As in some other parts of Racine, a reddish (perhaps Cherokee red?) type of concrete pavement, smoother and flatter than bricks, was installed to meet accessibility requirements. Although they are all actually the same color, the squares of the crosswalks are brushed at right angles to each other in an alternating pattern, which under certain light conditions gives the appearance of a zebra-stripe crosswalk.

In addition, a two-block stretch of 16th Street along the S. C. Johnson headquarters, from Howe to Franklin to Center, received special historic consideration. Along those blocks, the sidewalk was already wider than usual and the green space parkway between the sidewalk and the street was narrower. That widened sidewalk contains an intermittent inlay of decorative red brick, echoing the brickwork of the adjacent S. C. Johnson Administration Building and Research Tower. These inlays were preserved and, in some places, even restored as needed.

Street parking will now be prohibited along the entire stretch from Racine Street to Main Street, except for two blocks (from Grand to Villa to Park) where it is permitted on the north side of 16th to accommodate an existing convenience store at Grand Avenue. As a result, the parkway was reduced only along those two blocks, and was actually widened along all the other blocks.

The full reconstruction of this corridor ultimately replaced portions of the storm sewer system, repaired the severely deteriorated pavement, replaced a few sidewalk slabs and all corner cuts, and installed new street lighting, landscaping, pavement markings, and signage, including bike lanes in both directions. The extent and duration of this project was not without its frustrations and delays. However, everyone has been pleased to finally admire and drive over the new intersection at 16th and College Avenue. A small plaque might even be erected nearby to point out the street's historic significance.

The street design and reconstruction was funded by the state Surface Transportation Program, which allocates federal funds to complete certain improvements on eligible roads and streets in urban areas. Preservation Racine, along with many others, are grateful to this program and the cooperation of residents, government authorities (federal, state and city), engineers, construction workers, project managers, and all who worked together to give us back a little piece of history.

p.s. Might we hope that the College Avenue intersections at 17th and 18th Streets be similarly restored someday?

Janet Carter

Finding Preservation Racine's Newsletters Online

Have you ever wished that you could look up something about the Racine area that we've researched? Maybe you wonder if we've ever delved into a place or topic, or you may even remember seeing a newsletter article about it. Or perhaps you're just curious about the history of people and places associated with Racine County. Well, you're in luck—here's how to find our newsletters from the past.

After organizing in 1973 and conducting our first Tour of Historic Places in 1974, Preservation Racine began publishing quarterly newsletters in 1976 featuring the local history of buildings and people of Racine County, along with many photos. Some years ago, in order to make these publications more widely available to the public, Preservation Racine collaborated with the Archives and Area Research Center at the University of Wisconsin–Parkside. Under the supervision of Preservation Racine's own Historian, Sharon Baldukas, and the UWP archivist, Anna Stadick, several college students digitally scanned the newsletters and put them online at the Recollection Wisconsin website, which also contains many other collections of historical Wisconsin materials, in partnership with the Digital Public Library of America.

Since that site is a little overwhelming, you can easily view our past newsletters right from our own website at http://preservationracine.org/

1. Click the down arrow there to see the site menu.
2. Select Publications.
3. Select Newsletters.

The bulk of our past newsletters (over 100 issues), starting with the first one in Spring 1976 up through Summer 2009, were digitized and are available via the link in the text on that page, **Wisconsin Digital Library**.

In addition, you'll see a list there of recent newsletters (from the present and going back to 2014) which have not yet been added to the Wisconsin Digital Library. We confess that there's also a gap from 2013 back through Fall 2009, as those newsletters were published after the Recollection Wisconsin project, and haven't been added to our website either. However, copies of all of our newsletters are filed in Preservation Racine's office and archives at the Blake House; they are available on a limited basis to members when doing research for our projects. The newsletters are also available at the Racine Public library and the Racine Heritage Museum.

You can binge-read the online collection in chronological order or skip around as you please (and don't forget the more recent newsletters in the list on our website). Note that in many years the wrapper for the annual Tour of Historic Places booklet represented the Fall newsletter issue, but the tour booklets containing the building histories have not been digitized. In addition, there are a few times when we did not publish a quarterly newsletter. In most cases, however, you'll be able to find a wealth of information on a variety of topics about Racine County's past.

The newsletters in the Wisconsin Digital Library's collection are also searchable, in case you're looking for a specific topic. Just enter a keyword or two in the search field at the top, such as an event, a person's last name, a street, a business, or even just the numbers of a particular street address. Several newsletter issues may pop up with that search term highlighted in color, making it easy to scroll through an issue's pages (using the left and right page turn arrows) to find what you're looking for. A few other features are available, but a simple search is often the easiest.

So whether you're researching a house, family, or business, or if you just have some time on your hands (especially now!), turn on your device and read up on the interesting history of the Racine area. You will discover that screen time can be educational, enjoyable, and worthwhile!

Janet Carter

From the President

It's been an important month, despite having no program meetings. The Board had its second virtual meeting and we are becoming quite sophisticated about that!

There have also been things to keep an eye on. Firstly, as you'll see elsewhere in this Newsletter, our previous president, Steven Rogstad, has published his book on Abraham Lincoln that he has been working on for a considerable time. Many congratulations to him!

Secondly, although Preservation Racine has not been formally involved, there have been developments over the Capitol/Park Theater on Washington Avenue. One of our members has been working tirelessly since early this year to save it from a raze order, and there is now an oversight committee with plans for new ownership and renovation over time. Those plans would have been greatly helped by a "Landmark" status for the building, and although it seemed for a while as if this might actually happen, the Planning, Heritage and Design Commission decided on November 18 not to recommend this. That makes our work harder, but has not stopped us.

It is perhaps worth reiterating the truth about this building: (A) It is not in danger of collapse – it is built like a fortress and if razed it will go down fighting. (B) It is dirty, but there is no sewage inside it – and if there were, we don't usually raze buildings that have had a sewage back-up. (C) It does meet the criteria for a landmark designation. (D) Its Mediterranean Revival style is rare and interesting for a theater. (E) Its interior plasterwork largely survives and can be completely restored – and the plasterwork around the proscenium is delightful with entwined and colored ropes and roses. (F) Its stage curtains survive intact – from 1920! Finally, (G) It could be incorporated well into the West Racine Development Plan, as it is in the center of the block where it will be visually attractive and could hold boutique outlets and restaurants as well as providing a venue for local performance events.

At the same meeting the Commission adopted a new raze-order ordinance to align with County policy: that a building may be razed even while it is being researched and prepared for a "historical" or "landmark" status. It has therefore become that much more difficult to protect our heritage, and it is essential to be more vigilant about what is going on. It is too late to raise an outcry when the raze order is announced.

So I will close by inviting our members to volunteer to keep an eye on something specific. For example, you could form small groups and take turns searching the local and national press to catch important information on a timely basis, or walk around a designated area to keep an eye on the condition of the buildings there, or monitor developing ordinances using the City's online legislative calendar. I am suggesting members form these groups independently to undertake small, temporary assignments that can be done during this COVID lockdown. Let us know that you exist, and about anything that comes to your attention. This will keep us alert and informed. Either email me as President michelli@plinia.net, or other board members if you know them better.

Let us get organized to work constructively with the City instead of howling our distress when it is too late!

Happy Thanksgiving to all of you,
Pippin Michelli, President

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