PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

WINTER 2021
Volume 25

MADE IN RACINE - SILVERPLATE

Jewelry boxes made by Racine Silverplate Co. The one on the left is made in the shape of a piano!

Racine has always been known as a great manufacturing city. For the most part, however, the goods that were made in Racine's factories were geared for the industrial market or for agricultural use. Other products satisfied our consumer needs, such as malted milk, wax products, automobiles, books, and a host of other items. However, Racine did manage to manufacture a few products for the "finer things in life." A good example would be the many beautiful silverplate pieces that were once produced at the Racine Silver Plate Company.

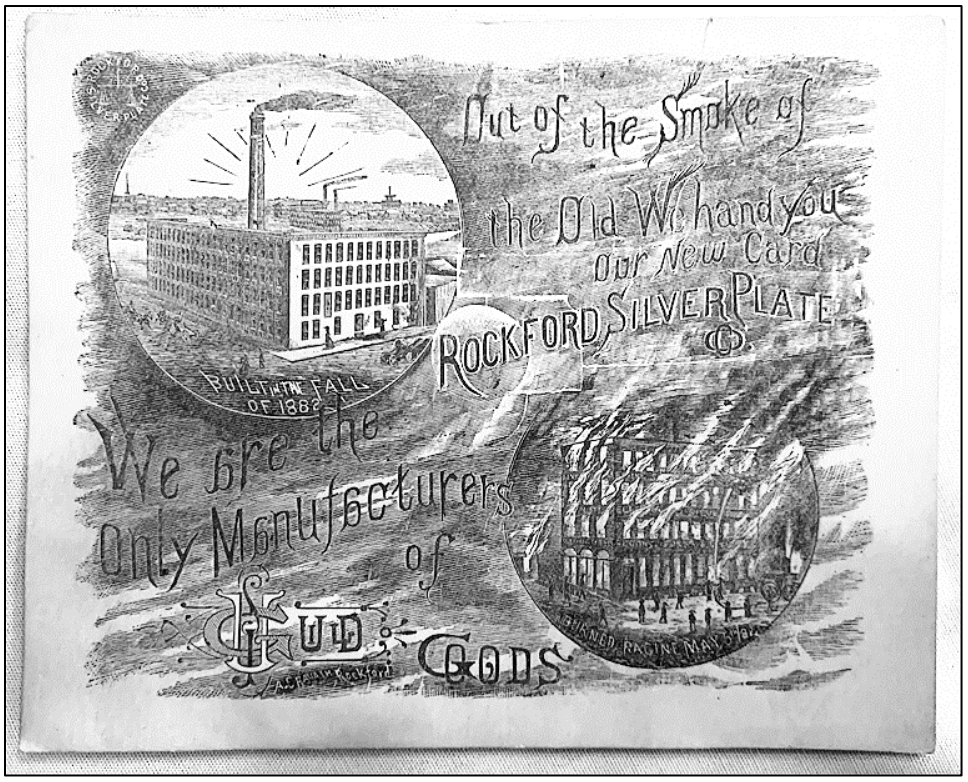
Organized in 1875, the company produced a variety of silver-plated ware during its relatively short history in Racine. Items such as sugar bowls, pickle casters, syrup dispensers, coffee and teapots, napkin holders, cups and goblets, candy dishes, large water pitchers, flower vases, cutlery and other tableware items were all made in their factory located on the northeast corner of Second and Main Streets, in our downtown area. The company's four-story brick building employed about 60 people.

Racine Silver Plate was a regional manufacturer with markets located throughout the Midwest. Most of their wares were sold by the finer jewelry stores and were considered to be of exceptional quality. Their goods were both functional and beautiful to look at. Most of their pieces were very ornate and quite pleasing to the eye. Some even had figures of animals on them, including birds, horses, lions, and even cows!

Three different RSP vase holders. Note the fine workmanship

All seemed to be going well for this young company until

that fateful day of May 5, 1882, when Racine experienced one of its worst disasters—an out-of-control raging fire that eventually destroyed about seven square blocks (primarily on Main Street, south of the bridge), including the lumber yards and grain elevators. As luck would have it, the Racine Silver Plate Company was directly in the path of this rapidly-spreading inferno, resulting in the complete destruction of the factory. After the fire, all that remained of the company were the gutted factory walls, smokestack, and a large amount of melted silver (caused by the intense heat) found in the rubble where the factory once stood. Ironically, a tornado toppled the old smokestack the following year!



Three different RSP vase holders. Note the fine workmanship

Faced with almost a total loss, the company began to make plans to rebuild. It was at this time that the city of Rockford, Illinois, made the company an attractive offer to rebuild in their city. The firm changed its name to the Rockford Silver Plate Company, and remained in business until the 1950s. Even today, pieces from the Racine Silver Plate Company are highly sought after by collectors (including myself!), as a silent reminder of this once-thriving business.

(More photographs on page 6.) Jim Mercier

From the President

How wonderful to see everyone at Monday's program meeting! After *nineteen months* without meetings, it was a joy to get together again, and to do so at such a lovely building and for such an interesting program. We met at the First Presbyterian Church at College Avenue and Seventh Street, designed by Lucas Bradley (who broke down and wept when the organ was moved from the gallery to the sanctuary), and the program was given by several church members, who discussed tantalizing shreds of evidence that the building had been one of the nodes for the Underground Railroad. And, in the church's archive, we viewed complete quilts and samples of the patterns used to direct escapees to the next refuge point.

The meeting was significant for several other reasons. Firstly, our treasurer Porter Venn sent a message of resignation owing to ill health. Porter has done us proud over the years and been much loved by us all. This was reciprocated by him when he said in his message that, *it has been a pleasure and an honor to have worked with the members of Preservation Racine during these years.*

Tragically, as we went to press, we received the news that he had died suddenly in hospital this morning (Wednesay, November 21). We will include a tribute to Porter in our next Newsletter. Meanwhile, our hearts go out to Maggie and, Porter, our prayers go with you!

Secondly, I was pleased to introduce our first intern, Andy Buchanan. Andy was a surprise gift to us from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, which has now listed this internship in the catalog of repeating courses, so we hope to continue hosting interns for the foreseeable future. Andy's internship began with an assignment to assist one of our Tour house captains, Tom Yagelski, on site. He is now working on a research project whose results will go into our archives; and he will complete his assignment by assisting archivist Debbie Yale in organizing and/or opening our archives to the public.

Thirdly, there was good news: Parkside has now approved a Community-Based Learning course in collaboration with Preservation Racine and given it a number! This means it is formally included in the course schedule and we can expect it to go ahead reasonably soon. The course,

called *Mission Critical: Saving Our Cities*, involves training students in local archival andonline research and activism (this last at the request of the university). So I take this opportunity to solicit volunteers to "buddy up" with one student each, just to hold their hand while they learn to research, to compare notes, encourage them along, and look through the class materials to keep on the same page. In addition, we will have the students attend Common Council meetings, identify an issue that may need activism, and raise awareness about it by writing to the City Administrators, the local and national Press and Radio, writing opinion pieces, and so forth. This is so exciting! Not only do we develop our relationship with the university, but we start raising awareness among a young demographic who may go on to have an impact in their own communities. *And*, if you need more persuasion, if you feel your own research skills need updating or expanding, by joining this course as a student-buddy, you get free training yourself! So, **email me** to become a part of this innovative preservation initiative! **michelli@plinia.net**

While on the subject of preservation initiatives, do remember that by the time a distressed building is presented to the Common Council, or is mentioned in the press, *it is too late to save it!* The municipal process of bringing it to the point of threat takes several years. So, while it is unrealistic to try and save every building, our ability to save any at all depends on our keeping an ear to the ground and mobilizing constructively before that process begins. Remember: if you become aware of anything that might indicate that a historically good building may be in danger or deteriorating, **contact us**! Use the email link on the website, **info@preservationracine.org** as a tip line. If the building is in private ownership, we will need to build a supportive relationship with the owner before any official trouble arises.

Finally, long-time member Judith Schulz has gifted us a lovely book for the archive, *Victorian Exterior Decoration* by Roger W. Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler, which demonstrates how to paint your nineteenth-century American house historically. Prolifically illustrated in color with photographs and illustrations from historic paint catalogs, it will be a fabulous resource for us! Thank you, Judith!

Best wishes to all for a joyous family season and an optimistic New Year.

Pippin Michelli

Looking for Century Buildings

In May 1988, Preservation Racine awarded its first Century Building Certificates to the owners of fifteen buildings that were at least 100 years old. This was at a small reception in the Green Room at Festival Hall during the annual National Historic Preservation Month – a time of recognition established in 1973 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to recognize and promote historic places, emphasizing the social and economic benefits of historic preservation.

Since those first awards over 33 years ago, more than 400 such certificates have been bestowed upon Racine County buildings which have survived for at least a century in relatively good condition. These certificates are purely a local honorary designation, honoring the preservation of older buildings which are significant for their architectural, aesthetic, and historical value.

People often say, "My house/building is over 100 years old. How do I get an award?" Good question, but the answer is not all that simple.

First of all, our researchers and other members constantly are on the alert, keeping an eye open for old buildings in Racine County which they may see or which may have been suggested to them. Note that, for our evaluation, we do not go inside the buildings or consider interior remodeling or condition. We do scrutinize the buildings from the street, however, looking for the exterior to be a fine representation of its original style and materials.

The Century Buildings committee officially meets early each year to discuss and develop a preliminary list of potential Century Building candidates. The committee members then set out a few days later, individually or in carpools, to take several drives around Racine County – going down narrow city streets, cruising slowly within smaller villages, and traversing winding country lanes – to view potential candidates and even take some photos.

We look for a combination of architectural attributes: Does the building largely retain its original exterior, which may be clapboard siding, brick, stone, stucco, or other materials, or has it been covered with newer siding material, and if so, was it sensitively done, closely imitating the dimensions and texture of the original materials? Do the windows have the original style of frames and even old glass, or have they been replaced with vinyl or aluminum ones, at least retaining the original proportions and styles, or perhaps not? Does the building retain most of its original appearance and charm or grandeur, or has it been obscured by later insensitive additions, remodeling or "remuddling"? Are there period-appropriate front steps, front and even side doors, porch columns and balustrades, maybe gable windows and trim, or have nonoriginal materials or styles been used, and to what effect? Is the exterior currently in excellent condition, or does it have peeling paint, cracked or broken masonry, amateurish tuckpointing, sagging gutters, or other obvious issues? We are aware that not every feature can be maintained or replicated, and in some cases a building would never have survived this long without certain major exterior changes, but overall the impression should be that each building has been sensitively cared for and still is a fine example of its historical background.

After narrowing down the list to a number of promising candidates, the researchers delve more deeply into the buildings' origins. The city tax records are somewhat useful but notoriously inaccurate, so additional research is always necessary. The city directories can also be very helpful, but they too have a few drawbacks: they were published annually or biannually, so of course there was always a lag between the time a structure was built and first occupied and the date the directory was published. Also, while there may indeed have been a house or business at a particular address over 100 years ago, it might not have been the same one as the building now standing there. The researchers therefore also visit libraries, museums, archives, and local historical societies to peruse old plat maps and Sanborn fire insurance maps, looking for building locations as well as their sketched footprints and other attributes, such as exterior materials, window placement, and number of stories. They also decipher handwritten tax rolls, scroll through microfilm, or view online newspaper archives and other sources, looking for evidence to verify that a building is indeed 100 years old. Sometimes we find that the building is not as old as we think it is; other times we find that it already received an award, perhaps over 30 years ago!

In addition to obtaining a building's architectural history, the researchers also glean some details of the various owners over the years, the businesses located in the building, or historical events that occurred there. Also, architectural and historical research is done to identify the type of building – is it Italianate, Victorian, or what? The researcher often must research the terminology to describe and identify corbels, keystones, balustrades, transoms, and other architectural details. Luckily, Preservation Racine and other local organizations have many experienced and even expert members and historians who are happy to help each other, especially newer committee members and researchers.

While we like to say that the awards are actually made to the buildings (and our hope is that a certificate will indeed remain with the building even if the owners themselves move), we do need to find the current owners to actually receive the certificates. As the building candidates are narrowed down to truly century-old buildings in fine condition, a little more research is often needed to identify and locate these owners. They are then contacted and invited to the awards evening. In addition, the buildings are professionally photographed and the certificates are prepared and printed. The event venue must also be identified and hospitality services, decorations and refreshments arranged. It takes a lot of volunteer work but it's also very rewarding and fun, and new people are always welcome to join in.

In addition to inviting our members to be researchers and provide other assistance for the event, the Century Buildings committee is also continually open to receiving potential Century Building suggestions. Although we did not have a Century Buildings celebration in 2020 or 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, we look forward to again awarding Century Building certificates in May 2022, and with your help, we're ready to start the process again now.

Of the more than 400 awards so far, almost 75% (over 300) have been in the City of Racine. The other 100+ awardees are scattered elsewhere throughout Racine County, which includes the City of Burlington; the

Villages of Caledonia, Elmwood Park, Mount Pleasant, North Bay, Rochester, Sturtevant, Union Grove, Waterford, Wind Point and Yorkville; and the Towns of Burlington, Dover, Norway, Raymond and Waterford.

Within these villages and towns are also numerous unincorporated communities without defined borders, some with histories at least as old as the larger municipalities. These include Beaumont, Bohners Lake, Browns Lake, Buena Park, Caldwell, Crestview, Dover, Eagle Lake, Franksville, Honey Lake, Husher, Ives Grove, Kansasville, Lake Park, North Cape, Rosewood, Sylvania, Tabor, Tichigan, Wind Lake, and others, some nearly forgotten. Of course the City of Racine is larger and older than most of the other municipalities, and it's also easier to find historical city documents than information from the outlying areas, but we're always up for a challenge and the opportunity to recognize hidden gems in these smaller communities.

If any of these locations remind you that you might know of potential Century Buildings anywhere within Racine County, please contact us. Whether it's a house, business, church, school, depot, barn or other structure, please provide the address (or other location details as best you can) and the current building owners' contact information if known, along with any other helpful details, and we'll take it from there. Maybe we'll even recruit you to do some research or serve on our committee in other ways. Let us know your suggestions!

Janet Carter

Racine's Tiny Tim and the Prosthesis Curved Hinge

As you know, the December program meeting will be a presentation by Rochelle Pennington on Charles Dickens' motivation for writing *A Christmas Carol*. Since the lynchpin of this story is "Tiny Tim", we thought this would be a good time to focus on Racine's own Tiny Tim: William Didier, who was also "crippled" like little Tim.

William Didier was only 16 when he lost his leg in an industrial accident in Racine's Beebe Bicycle Shop, a manufacturing facility. In 1891 it was the custom of the day to immediately fire the injured person and escort him or her out the door. Since he could no longer walk, William was carried to his home, deposited on the door step and was considered unemployable. Thanks to a sister Lillian who tended to him carefully, a leg was all he lost. Many amputees lost their lives to infection.

But there's lemonade in this story. After hobbling around the area without full employment opportunities, Didier, who was a trained mechanic, became inventive and with the help of his father, created a curved hinge that could let his leg prosthesis bend at the knee. He possibly walked with a limp, but there were likely a number of people who didn't know his leg from the knee down was missing.

In addition, there's lemon cake to go with that lemonade. Mr. Didier was very successful in his efforts to manufacture the hinges that he had developed. Moving from an outbuilding behind his family home at 1208 Schiller Street, he with blacksmith William Peal moved into a much larger facility at 1648-1652 Phillips Avenue. Mr. Didier prospered to the point that his company was the choice of the British government to supply prostheses following World War I. This aided the success of the William Didier Manufacturing Company into becoming during the 1920s one of the largest manufacturers of mechanical prosthesis products around the globe. During World War II, the company supplied the United States military as well as the Canadian and the Soviet militaries with their various limb parts. They reportedly never made the limbs themselves, just the mechanical entities that operated them. This included arm hinges as well as ones for legs, knees and ankles.

WALTONS TO SEINE ZOO PARK LAGOON

Spawning Beds Planned for First Stock of Black Bass.

Directed by William Didier and W. Harold Pugh, a number of members of the local chapter of the Izaak Walton league will go to the zoo tomorrow afternoon at 1 o'clock for the purpose of preparing the pond for black bass which will be placed there by the chapter for propagation purposes.

The Waltonians will seine the pond to remove all carp it contains and will prepare spawning beds by placing sufficient gravel along locations suitable for breeding purposes. Fish food also will be planted in the pond.

Mr. Didier today issued a call asking all members of the chapter not otherwise engaged to be at the zoo tomorrow afternoon prepared to assist in the work.

Racine Journal News, May 10, 1929, page 1

Naturally, William Didier profited from his own invention, so that his love of outdoors pursuits seems to have been entirely unaffected by the loss of his leg: he was a long-term member of the Izaak Walton foundation (one of the earliest national conservation societies), a prize-winning fisherman, and active with the local scouts.

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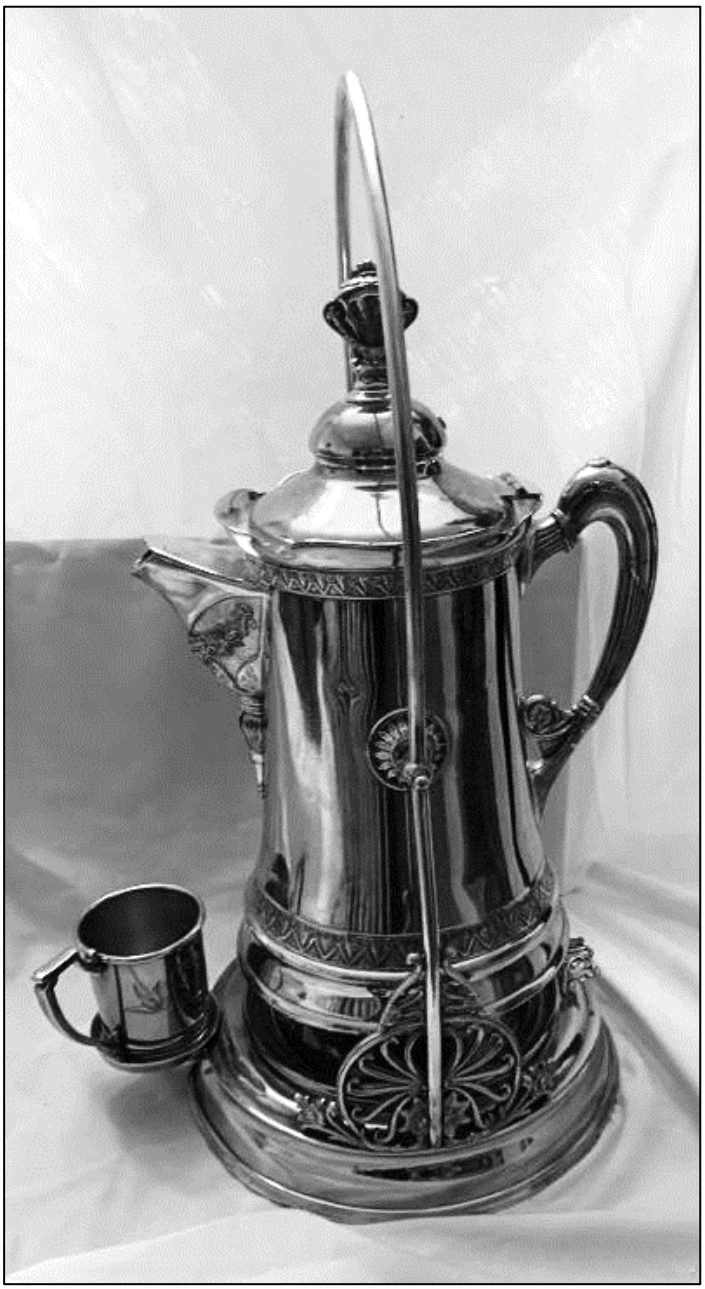
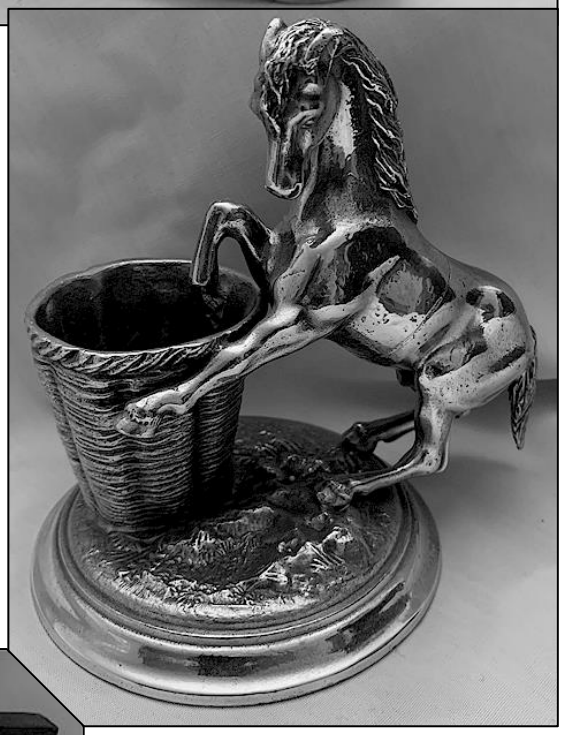




***Above**: This beautiful water pitcher measures 20 inches tall, and can actually pivot towards the goblet by pushing on the handle. Comes complete with a removable plate underneath that holds ice in order to keep the contents chilled.*

***Above**: Napkin ring and salt and pepper holder. The wheels actually work, enabling the cart to move.*

***Below:** Racine Silver Plate made many pieces showing various animals. This one uses a horse as the centerpiece.*

***Left:** Ornate cake knife inside the original box. "Racine Silver Plate" can be seen on the box.*

Dania Hall: A Heritage Building

Dania Hall is an imposing three-story, red brick building built in 1905 at 1019 State Street. It was in the heart of the large Danish immigrant community, once called Little Denmark, and was the home of the Dania Society that provided support – cultural, educational, civic, benevolent, and social activities to its members of Danish descent. It had an oversized impact on the development of Racine.

Between 1860 and 1870 about 3,000 Danes came to Racine. On May 17, 1867, a group of nine Danish immigrants met at Andrew Petersen's house on Northwestern Avenue in "Sagetown" (an area once owned by Racine pioneer Joel Sage, platted by his son Sidney) and formed a society to help Danish newcomers; Julius Stahr was the first president. The preamble to its constitution says it existed for "the culture and practice of its members in music, debating and study of languages; and for benevolent purposes, mutual support in cases of sickness, and aid to families of deceased members."

Dania Hall, 1019 State Street, built 1905, designed by James Gilbert Chandler and Linus H. Park

Within six months, the members' homes could no longer hold all the immigrants who wanted to join, so meetings moved to Gamle Maren's boarding house on West Street. In 1871 Reed's Hall was rented for meetings and social functions. Five years later funds were raised to build their first building at 817 State Street. Also in 1876, the group adopted the name the Dania Society and incorporated under Wisconsin law. The new building allowed internal groups like the Men's Singing Club and Dania Dramatic Club to flourish. Visits from well-known Danish celebrities were very popular as were other Danish language performances. In 1882 Danish societies throughout the United States combined to form the United Danish Society. There were eventually 50 chapters in the states; Racine Dania was known as Dania #1.

In 1879 a group of ladies asked to hold monthly meetings at Dania Hall. Ten cents per meeting were collected as dues, a significant amount of money in 1879! They called themselves the Ten Cent Aid Society; dues remained ten cents for 96 years and the money was used to help needy people of Danish descent. Occasionally they helped other organizations; they helped fund the opening of St. Luke's Hospital and keep it open during the Depression. One of the charter members, Mrs. Hans Peter Nelson, was the mother of two-term Racine mayor Peter B. Nelson who served from 1903 to 1907. By 1975 membership was 130 women, but only about 24 attended the regular meetings. The society was assisting fifteen Danes living at High Ridge Hospital who had neither family nor friends to look after them. They also provided a yearly luncheon and program for residents of the Danish Old People's Home. In 1981 the 102 years-old organization disbanded. (A Dania Ladies group formed in 1912 whose main concern was social activities, but assisted the Dania Society in many ways.)

By 1904 membership had reached 800 and J.I. Case Company was expanding; the society voted to sell their building and adjacent property to J.I. Case Threshing Machine Company. Two lots (47' x 150' and 60' x 150') were purchased in the 1000 block of State Street where Compty & Christensen Horseshoers and Anthony Bye Wagonmaker (a former blacksmith) were located. Prominent local architects James Gilbert Chandler & Linus H. Park were hired to design their new building for $400. The new Dania Hall was completed on October 10, 1905. Contractors were Daniel Danielson Excavators, C. Christensen Mason Works, and G. C. Andersen did the balance of the work. The construction costs were

$28,427; the total cost to open the building was $35,000. The 1904 decision to sell the previous building was fortunate, as a fire in 1909 destroyed it.

The Hall is a symmetrical, three-story, front gable-roofed, predominately Beaux Arts Classical design with some Neoclassical characteristics. It is made of red brick with limestone accents. Three large stone Roman arches top the centered entrance and the two triple-light windows that flank it on the first floor. A stone stringcourse with dentil brickwork caps the first floor and forms the plinth for four huge paired pilasters with stone bases and Ionic capitals on the second and third floors. Two double-hung windows are between the pilasters, and recessed brick panels separate the floors. Four narrow windows with keystones are aligned under the pilasters on the first floor. Above a half-round window with keystone, a full, bracketed pediment with denticulated cornice top the imposing building. The roof sports four chimneys and an octagonal cupola with a flagpole.

The interior of the hall had a restaurant and bar, beautiful curved staircases and a 2,500-volume Danish language library. The top floor had a ballroom with horseshoe shaped ballroom with an elaborate stage with five dressing rooms and a beautiful balcony. The dance floor was a maple-strip, spring-sprung hydraulic floor; the foundation of springs imperceptibly absorbs the weight of the dancers. This is one of only two existing in Wisconsin, the other is in Rochester, Wisconsin at Chances bar. In 1948 a new dining room was made, and the library and kitchen remodeled. In 1962 another interior remodel was done costing $29,650, plus new furniture for $13,768.

In the 1980s Dania's active membership had declined significantly; although membership was three hundred only seventy-four were in attendance at the meeting to vote to close and sell Dania Hall. Age was taking its toll on the Society; the average age of the membership was seventy-two. Dania Hall was closed on September 30, 1987. In June 1988 the building was purchased by Racinian Dee (Diane L.) Smith and her fiancé Troy K. Benson of Waukegan, Illinois. They planned to open a lunch and dinner restaurant, with ballroom dancing, polkas and music from the 1950s and '60s on the weekends. They bought the building for $62,000 and the contents for $20,000. According to the city directory Dee Dee's Dania was open from 1989 through 2015.

During Dania Hall's heyday Racine was called "the Danish capital of the United States" and "the most Danish city outside Denmark." The Danes' impact on Racine was remarkable for many reasons. A quarter of the city's population was of Danish descent in 1910. Pioneer skilled tradesmen from Denmark became the core of Racine's building trades, factories, and manufacturing concerns. J.I. Case recruited trained craftsmen from Denmark and Mitchell & Lewis Wagon Works hired Danish workers almost exclusively. The prospect of abundant jobs, more personal freedoms, males' right to vote, good laws and security appealed to the competent, upwardly mobile Danes. They welcomed the emphasis on their Danish culture and heritage that the Dania Society provided, but they fully embraced the American ideals of personal betterment and good citizenship in their adopted home-land. Dania Hall had English language classes in the evening and encouraged the learning of American culture. Danish immigrant Jens Hvid led the first Fourth of July parade in 1877, and continued as parade marshal for forty years. Mayor Peter Nelson is remembered for creating the first park board, rousing support for parks from the public and the wealthiest and most influential citizens to create Horlick (now called Island Park), Riverside, Washington and North Beach Parks. He also got Danish born Jens Jensen, the "Dean of American Landscape Architecture" and famous for his work designing Chicago parks, to design the Racine parks system. Jensen was instrumental in saving North Beach from industrialization, encouraging the city to purchase the land. Even before he was mayor, Nelson was also influential in establishing the Racine Public Library.

Debbie Yale,
with contributions from Michele Caskey

Blake House Archives

Before Sharon Baldukas moved away, she was working with Bonnie Sommer to get the files at the Blake House organized and accessible for easier use. We would like to be open for Preservation Racine researchers and the public. The only way that can happen is if we can attract some members to volunteer to get familiar with the contents of our archives and be willing to be available to "man the desk" occasionally. Bonnie and I are still trying to find a good day to work at the Blake House because our schedules conflict so often, but working there is the best way to learn what's there and where it is.

What I am thinking we could do is have the archives open a couple of evenings and/or afternoons a few weeks a month or so before our Century Building awards

celebration in the spring and the Tour in the fall for PR researchers. For the whole year I think we could post a time we are open, but still take reservations. With enough volunteers we could also cover specific time requests.

I am inviting anyone interested in learning more about our archives and making it more available to Preservation Racine members and the public to meet with me the week of November 29 to December 3; I am available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday. Call or email me and we'll try to get a day and time that will work. I hope to hear from you!

Debbie Yale, 262-498-8753, deb.yale5@gmail.com

Modern Beauty - Preservation Racine's 44th Tour of Historic Places

This year's Tour of Historic Places was in the area of the Village of Elmwood Park and was originally proposed as the 2020 tour site in honor of the 60th anniversary of the village. COVID19 caused a delay of one year, but this year's tour day could not have been more glorious. The weather was warm and sunny, the buildings had great stories to tell, the sites were within walking distance of each other and there was adequate parking. It was "a beautiful day in the neighborhood!"

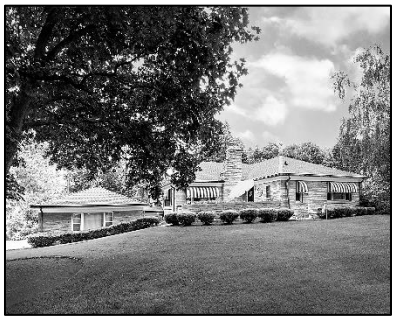
A successful tour requires many volunteers. Soon after the places were chosen, the research began. Jim Mercier has lived on Lathrop Avenue for many years and had previously been asked to examine the history of his and his neighbors' surroundings: the Hansche Ponds (also known as the Spring Lakes Subdivision). This area is immediately south of Elmwood Park. Jim knew Mel Hansche, one of the grandsons of Rudolph Hansche, who arrived in this area in 1841, eventually purchasing 80 acres and beginning the farming and other enterprises of his family. The Hansches raised potatoes, cabbage, onions and other cash crops. In the 1940s they opened Spring Lake Mink Farm facing Lathrop Avenue. This farmland also was used as a gravel and stone quarry. Jim tells us that, "as the interurban began pushing northwards from Chicago back in the 1890s, gravel and rocks were needed for the railroad's road bed … much of the gravel came from these pits as the line pushed into Wisconsin." This line was originally known as the Chicago and Milwaukee Electric Railway (later called the North Shore Line). This railroad came to Racine in 1906, to Milwaukee the next year, and eventually ended operation in 1963. It is not clear when the quarry ceased operation, but the Hansche brothers then developed the land into a natural area, grading their property, allowing the pits to fill with spring water and planting trees. In 1977, with suburban living in demand, the property was subdivided, providing large lots with pond frontage and space for beautiful houses and grounds.

The age of buildings on this year's tour range from between 1926 and 1961, offering a variety of styles and purposes. The oldest, Beebe School, was the third school built on what is now known as 3354 Taylor Avenue. Plans were initiated in 1925 to build a two-room school. It was announced that "Upon completion, it would be the most modern two teacher school in the state." The need for more space required a second story addition above the two-room school. On October 13, 1929, the modern art deco style red brick building with decorative brick and stone work was opened. "Beebe became one of the largest, most modern schools in this part of the state, with four classrooms, an auditorium (basement), five teachers and eight grades." In 1941 the seventh and eighth grade students were moved to Mitchell School, followed by the sixth-grade students in 1951, because of overcrowding. In 1961 Beebe School became part of the newly formed Racine Unified School District, finally closing in 1973 with the remaining 300 students moving to Hansche and Johnson Schools. The Village of Elmwood Park purchased the school and grounds in 1977, allowing the building to be used as the village hall, several daycare centers, an office for the American Cancer Society and a church. The grounds became a park. In 2015 Evergreen Academy leased the school building for their sixth through eighth grade classes. Elmwood Park's village hall is now located at 3131 Taylor Avenue.

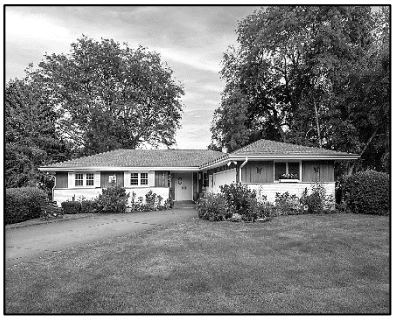
The two oldest houses presented on this year's tour were built, respectively, in 1927 and 1930. The 1927 Tudor revival style house, built at 3225 Moorland Avenue, was one of the first houses built in Elm

Terrace, a new subdivision in the town of Mount Pleasant, immediately north of Elmwood Park. This type of home was called "WELL-BILT," promoting a better quality of living, but it came with restrictions … "It should be noted that lots in this highly restricted area are sold on strict conditions and each homemaker must agree to terrace and landscape his lawns."

The 1930 Art Deco/ American Foursquare house built for Albert J. and Helen Dremel at 3357 Taylor Avenue was considered so elegant that the Grant Furniture Company took out a large, illustrated advertisement showing photographs of the house entirely furnished by them.



This year's tour highlighted three exceptional mid-century modern style houses built in 1950, 1954, and 1960. The 1950 raised ranch house wrapped in glowing rose-gold Lannon stone located at 3342 Taylor Avenue was built for Bertram Howard and Bernice Schaffer.



The 1960 mid-century rambler, located at 3317 Standish Lane, was built for Tony and Marge Bogus. Both are fine examples of the new suburban living: wide, expansive plots accommodating sprawling houses with step-ups and step-downs, attached garages with short, wide driveways allowing direct entry into the house, and use of the newest building materials (commercial grade plate glass, engineered wood beams, and exterior quality plywood) all contributed to the open, airy feeling of these houses.

The property located at 3601 South Elmwood Drive was built in 1954 for Michael and Connie Salvano. It is one of several houses designed by Hans Geyer in Elmwood Park. It features the three predominant characteristics of a mid-century building: a clean, minimalistic aesthetic, an emphasis on bringing the outdoors inside and the presence of angular structures. The backyard is attached to Spring Lake (formerly Hansche Pond) with lake views from all levels of the house.

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, located at 3350 Lathrop Avenue, graciously opened their doors for this year's tour. This beautiful, modified A-frame style church was built in 1961, exhibiting clean design, open space, exposed beams, loft-style interior and expansive stained-glass windows. This is also where Jim Mercier exhibited materials on the history of the Elmwood Park area (including an aerial view taken by Mr. Hansche in the 1960s) and the story of cigar manufacturing in Racine. This was the spot to stop and snack on a cookie and a glass of lemonade. The church also hosted the after-tour dinner.

Commemorating the Taylor Orphan Asylum, the marker represented both the oldest and the newest object on the tour. The marble plaque dates to 1872, while the monument was dedicated 2017.

Preservation Racine's Tour of Historic Places could not succeed without our researchers, writers, volunteers, financial supporters, florists, and, foremost, the owners who open their houses and buildings each year.

Thanks to everyone's efforts, the tour grossed $16,253.79, with expenses of $2211.31, yielding a net income of

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Vivian Merlo and Pippin Michelli, Tour Co-Chairs

Racine's Tiny Tim (continued from page 5)

Mr. Didier retired in 1943. His business was then sold to William Kenton and Julius Alperovitz who in turn sold it to Acme Die Casting Corporation. In 1972 it became Foster Manufacturing which carried on making these parts until the time newer developments made them obsolete, and the Foster company concentrated on other products. Many of us today are walking around with artificial knees and hips, etc. That doomed the curved hinge, but it was quite the thing in the 1920s, 30s and 40s and was developed and manufactured in Racine.

William Didier was born on June 14, 1875, lost his leg in 1891, and died in 1959 at age 84.

Linda Ingram Schubert

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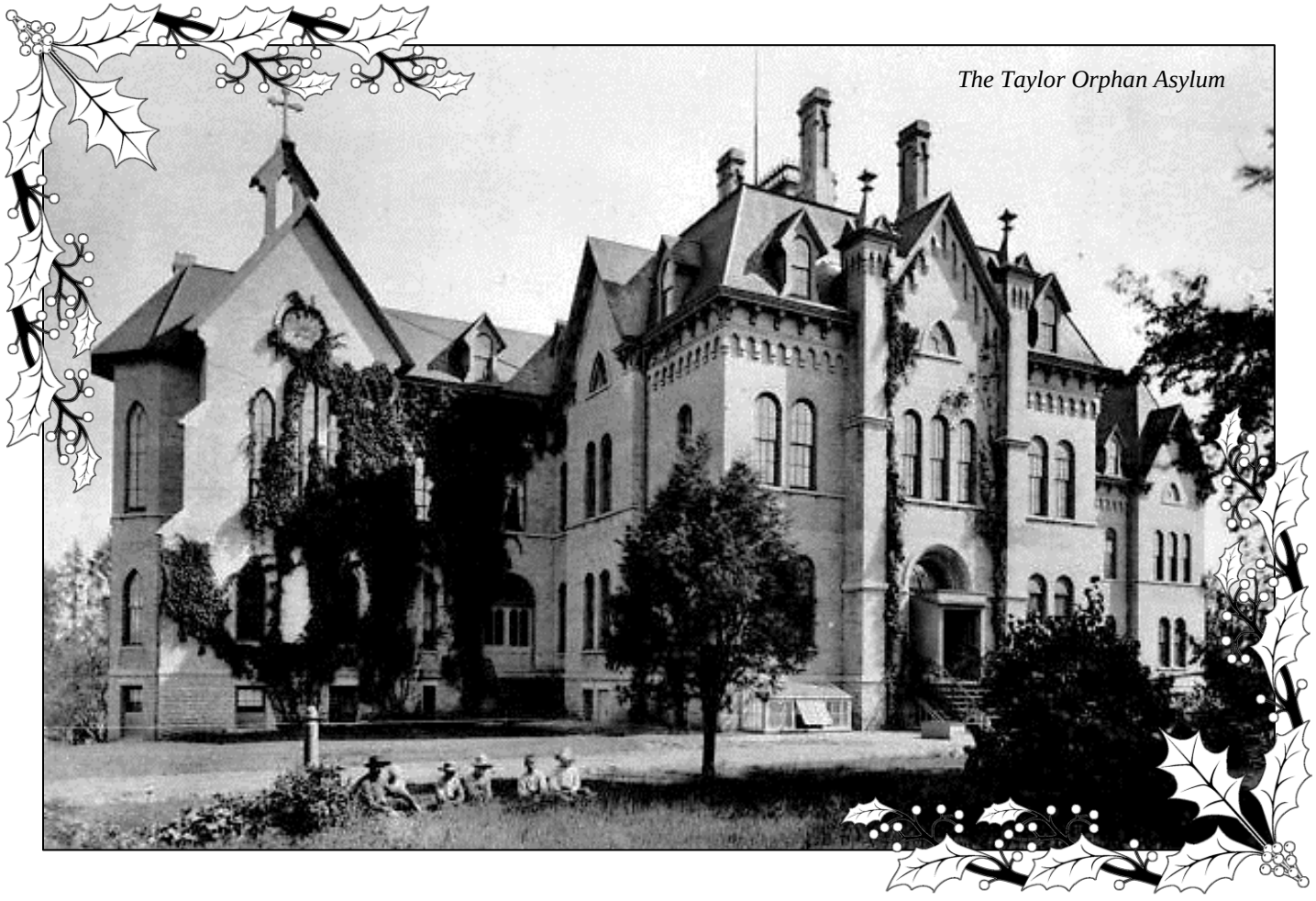

The Taylor Orphan Asylum