PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

WINTER 2022
Volume 29

A Surprise Visit

A surprise visit and gifts were delivered to the Blake House, Preservation Racine's Headquarters and home to our archive, on the afternoon of October 4, 2022. Ellen Nelson and her husband, Robert, live in Madison, Wisconsin and were in Racine for a visit. They had heard about Blake House and had called to make an appointment for a visit. Mary Ann McGinn, who had taken the original call, Mark Sommer, Preservation Racine's Vice-President and Debbie Yale, our archivist were there to meet them and give them a tour of our space. Vivian called George Mangold to invite him to join the group as he is descended from another line of Blakes. Ellen and Robert stopped with gifts for Preservation Racine. Ellen is the great-great-granddaughter of Lucius Sawyer Blake and Caroline Elliot Blake. Ellen donated to Preservation Racine the Blake family Bible and a silver teapot engraved with "Mrs. L S Blake" on its front. Ellen also emailed a portion of the Blake Family tree indicating that she is descended from Stella Blake, the daughter of Adoniram J. Blake, one of the sons of Lucius and Caroline's children.

Left to right, Ellen Nelson, George Mangold, and Robert Nelson.
Photo credit: Mark Sommer

The wording with gilded letters on the wooden cover of this very large edition of the Holy Bible is:

Presented to L. S. Blake
By His Wife
The Holy Bible
On His 61st Birthday

Since Mr. Blake was born on March 14, 1816, this would indicate that this gift was given in 1877.

The cover page reads "The Devotional Family Bible by the Rev. Alexander Fletcher, D. D., published by Virtue and Yorston, New York," with a full-page etching of Moses in the Bullrushes. On page 2 the following is printed: "The Devotional Family Bible containing the Old and New Testaments according to the most approved copies of the authorized version with practical and experimental reflections on each verse and rich marginal references and readings by the Rev. Alexander Fletcher, D. D." There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The header for the New Testament reads "The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the Most Approved copies of the authorized Version with practical and experimental Reflections on Each Verse and With Marginal Reflections & Readings by the Rev. Alexander Fletcher, D. D." Between the Old and New Testaments are a page for family records and 2 pages each for marriages and deaths. These pages were never filled out.

Following the New Testament is a "complete Index and Concise Dictionary of the Holy Bible." For example, the word "ointment; oil perfumed, used to anoint the head, c: Ps 133, 2; Ec.9, 1; Is. 1,6" gives us a definition of the meaning of the word and where it can be found in the Holy Bible. This is followed by a Chronological Index. Each of the 66 books begins with an "Argument" and the bottom of each page has footnotes and commentary. There are 40 full page etchings included in this edition. Since our November 2022 Membership Meeting focused on the Blake Opera House and another article in this newsletter talks about the restoration of the Blake House, this might be a time to once again review who Lucius

Sawyer Blake was. He was born on March 14, 1816 in Burlington, Vermont, working as an assistant in his father's carpentry shops, eventually apprenticed as a carpenter and joiner. The family moved westward from Vermont to Erie County, New York, then to Michigan, Chicago and finally settling on 600 acres of land in what is now Caledonia, Wisconsin. The Blake family was among the first American settlers in Racine. L. S. Blake manufactured fanning mills, (a farm implement which separated the wheat kernel from the chaff) first manual, then horse powered and finally steam powered. His business earned him the name "The Fanning Mill King." According to WIKIPEDIA, he also invested in other manufacturing business of Racine; serving as incorporator and president of Racine Woolen Mills, incorporator and president of Chicago Rubber Clothing Company of Racine, incorporator and director of the Huffman-Puffer Trunk Manufacturing Company, incorporator and director of the E. H. Pease Manufacturing Company, president of the Turner Stove Manufacturing Company, incorporator and director of the Racine Steam Knitting Company, president of the Blake and Beebe Bicycle Company, director of the Nail and Tack Manufacturing Company and director of the Manufacturers National Bank. He was treasurer of Racine County from January 1845 – January 1846, city railroad commissioner in 1860, member of the City Council 1869, 1871, 1873, 1874 and 1877. He was a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly from January 2, 1871 – January 1, 1872. Lucius and Caroline Elliot Blake had 5 children – Fransesa Blake (1844-1845), Lucius E. Blake (1846-1852), Byron Bradbury Blake (1848-1903), Stella Marion Blake (1852-1915), Adoniram Judson Blake (1856-1914). L. S. Blake died of sudden heart failure at his home in Racine on November 4, 1894.

Preservation Racine is deeply grateful to Ellen Nelson for her gifts to the Blake House.

Note: The George & Roxilana Bull family built what is known as the Blake House in 1868. The L. S. Blake family was the second family to live at 936 Main Street.

Vivian Merlo

Saving the Blake House

Saving the Blake House at 936 Main Street was Preservation Racine's first attempt at actually rescuing a building and it was quite a project. The property belonged to the Beth Israel Sinai Congregation which was considering knocking it down to expand their parking lot. A coalition of four groups – Preservation Racine, the Junior League of Racine, the Racine County Historical Society, and Racine Urban Aesthetics – was formed to save this historic house. On their behalf, Suzanne Foreman and attorney Bob Henzel approached the congregation with an offer to let the coalition rehabilitate and restore it. In 1977 a 20-year lease was implemented and work began.

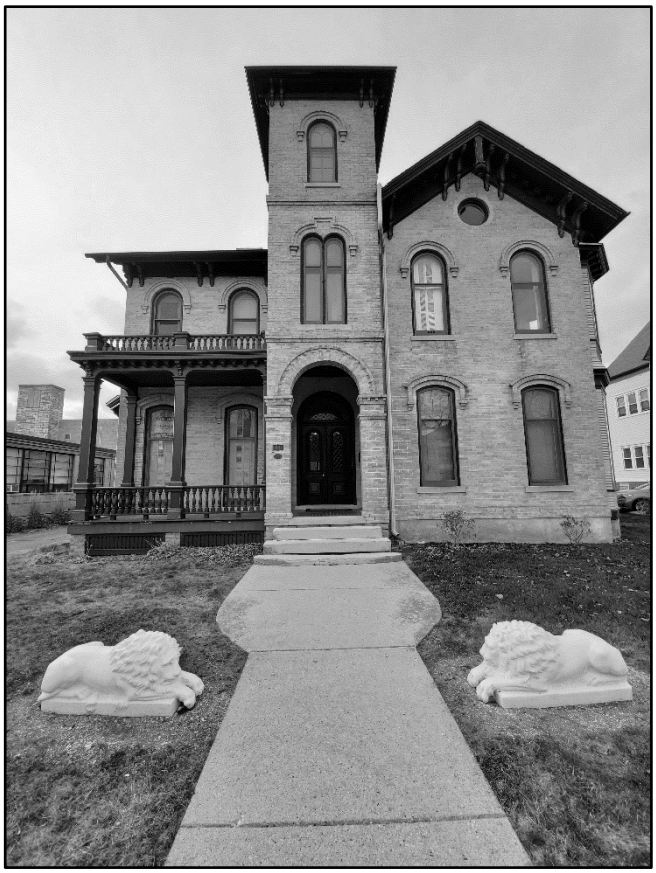


Photo credit: Xanthi Merlo

Overwhelming would hardly describe the task – for several years the Blake House had been subdivided into apartments and rented out to tenants who, in one instance, chose to paint a room of their apartment black! Just removing the clutter and debris from the house took several weeks and as many dumpsters before the real work could begin.

It actually bordered on the comical to see the always-immaculately groomed and coiffed Elizabeth Walker join forces with Fran Trumbull, whose nails were a manicurist's dream as they disassembled makeshift cupboards, one of which was built over a sink and toilet. There were those two genteel ladies emerging from the chaos covered in plaster dust. No one was more amused nor pleased with what was being accomplished than they were.

Whenever there was need for major demolition, Jim Fiene was called upon. He would eagerly appear with crowbar in hand, asking what he could tear apart. He loved the adventure of discovering what had been "built around" or "covered over." Amidst the stripping of wallpaper and removal of Spanish plaster there was a certain element of metamorphosis which excited us all as the former beauty of the Blake House emerged from under all those layers.

Thanks to the many dedicated volunteers and generous community business donations, the Blake House restoration project was an unqualified success. Not bad for a group that was once referred to as "young upstarts."

By 1985 costs for maintenance and restoration were estimated to be $65,000 with volunteer hours valued at $33,000. In July of 2005, Preservation Racine was able to purchase the Blake House, ending the lease originally signed with the temple which had called for a fixed fee of $1,500 for the first four years and holding the Blake House Restoration Inc. responsible for costs related to taxes, improvements, and other expenses. Revenue from the building's five rehabilitated units along with grants from the Johnson Wax Fund, the city of Racine Architectural Conservation Loan Fund, and a Junior League of Racine stipend had kept the project afloat.

On October 23, 2007, a reception was held at the Blake House to celebrate it being honored as the first structure to have been included in Racine's Southside Historic District, established in 1977 as well as the first to be listed as a local landmark under an ordinance enacted by the Common Council of Racine earlier that same year. Fittingly, today the Blake House remains the home of Preservation Racine's office and archives, reflecting the love and dedication of those whose diligence and determination willed it to survive.

Margo Drummond

Take a Walk on the Brick Side

Exactly two years ago an article in our newsletter described the City of Racine's major reconstruction of several blocks of 16th Street on the southeast side of the city, including its brick intersection with College Avenue. During the planning stages, the city had heard the concerns of a number of residents and preservationists, and had ultimately agreed that the asphalt-covered College Avenue bricks at that well-traveled intersection would be removed and replaced with reclaimed bricks. They were laid in a crisscross pattern similar to the design a block north on College, but with the modern addition of accessibility-compliant stamped-concrete pedestrian crosswalks, and everyone was pleased with the result.

At that time, however, it wasn't clear when — or even if — two other nearby asphalt-covered brick intersections would ever be uncovered and redone. In fact, the 2020 fall newsletter article concluded, "Might we hope that the College Avenue intersections at 17th and 18th Streets be similarly restored someday?" And hope we did!

The College Avenue bricks had originally been installed in 1897, extending curb to curb (without any gutters) right up to the high limestone curbing. More than a century later, in the early 2000s, the city planned to repair and resurface 17th Street from Wisconsin Avenue to Racine Street. The original College Avenue bricks were still there at the 17th Street intersection, buried under an asphalt overlay and due to be scraped, roughened, and re-covered with asphalt. There was much discussion about the project with city officials, including a neighborhood meeting and petition. Several College Avenue residents, including Don Rintz, Paul and Mary Zens, and Bob Weiglein, plus other nearby residents including Alderwoman Cherri Cape, and even the City Development Director, Brian O'Connell, finally convinced the City to leave the old asphalt-covered bricks undisturbed at that intersection, in the hope for a possible future restoration of the brick intersection someday. The residents said they would

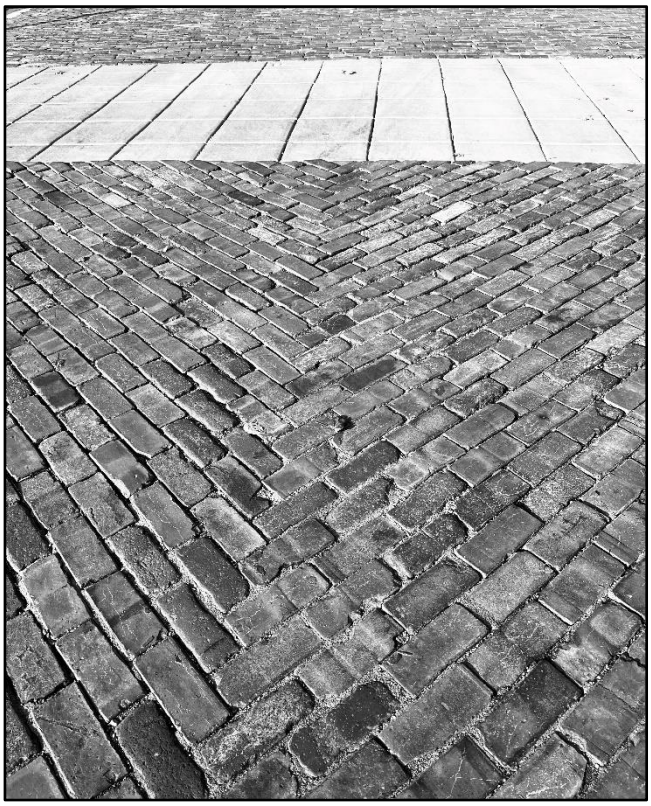


Photo credit: Janet Carter

rather live with the crumbling asphalt overlay than to see those bricks damaged or permanently removed.

Nevertheless, Paul and Mary Zens, who lived at that intersection, had to rush out in their bathrobes early one morning in 2003 when they saw the huge street demolition equipment preparing to tear up the bricks there. They stood in the intersection until the city attorney and the city engineer were contacted to verify that, contrary to the equipment operator's plan, the project had indeed been modified to spare that intersection. Thus, over many weeks that summer, the existing 17th Street asphalt was scraped off and redone with new asphalt, but its College Avenue intersection was skipped over and the bricks underneath were left largely untouched. An article by Paul and Mary Zens in our Winter 2003 newsletter described some of these efforts to preserve this ribbon of brick. The 18th Street intersection likewise remained in rough condition, with asphalt over its bricks and no apparent plans for improvement.

Then this past summer it suddenly happened! Residents, tourists, delivery truck drivers, and walkers tolerated a few weeks of road closures, big signs, construction equipment, workers, dust, and noise at both of those College Avenue intersections, one after the other. The old bricks were uncovered, removed, and sent for cleaning and reuse. Rusty old iron rails and spikes from the Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha (MRK) interurban electric rail line were uncovered and removed at 17th Street. To replace some utility connections, deep excavations were made in the sand — there's only about a foot or two of black dirt on the surface in that part of town, which was once a farm as well as a Civil War camp and training ground located on top of the remains of ancient sand dunes. Lastly, the roadway foundation was prepared for a special crew which laid reclaimed red bricks in the correct pattern at both the 17th and 18th Street intersections.

Finally, now, the College Avenue brick street extends uninterrupted for five blocks, from 14th Street to DeKoven Avenue. Today one can stroll down College Avenue and admire the four brick intersections at 15th through 18th Street. Each one has a pleasing and historic-looking crisscross brick pattern, and instead of patched and crumbling asphalt over bricks, the pedestrian crosswalks at 16th through 18th are easily-walkable stamped concrete. It's been a long journey for this short street portion, but the wait was well worth it.

Preservation Racine applauds the many residents, preservationists, businesses, project planners, government officials, contractors, and others who collaborated to restore these brick intersections to their former beauty. Thank you for your efforts which preserve and enhance the famed College Avenue brick street — our beloved brick street. It is now assured of giving even more enjoyment to many people for another century or longer!

Janet Carter

From the President

Now that the tour is done and almost completely wrapped up, I am pleased to tell you that this has been one of our best years, with net profit of $12,995 and just a couple more invoices still to come in. So, we will have netted over $13,000. Well done us!

I want to pat everyone on the back and thank them wholeheartedly for all their wonderful work, and their donated skills, time, and good will. Starting from behind the scenes, we owe a great deal to our researchers and site captains (sometimes one and the same), the various coordinating people and committees for volunteers, publications, marketing, floral displays, and signage. Moving to the day itself, we thank volunteers (over 200 of them!), the ticket station people, those in charge of refreshments during the day, and those who organized the catered meal at the end of the day. Of course, the tour could not have taken place without the generosity of the building owners: ACC Management Group (Gold Medal Lofts), the Community of St George Serbian Orthodox Church, Founders 3 (the William Apartments), Bill Hansen & Bob Groth, Marina District Lofts, Dee & Lance Safford, and Kevin Shuttleworth. The properties all looked beautiful, and we truly appreciate the care these owners have taken of their buildings, and the taste with which they brought them into condition to tour!

There were also important additional features that added to the richness of the day and the preparations for it: we thank photographers Carol Hansen and Brad Jaeck; artist Don Ricchio; the florists Flowers by Walter, Miller's Flowers, Personal Touch Flowers by Julie, and Petals by Felicia; and local collector Jim Mercier who made the display of Racine's ice-cream-making memorabilia. We are also grateful to the Racine businesses who made tour tickets available in advance: Borzynski's Farm & Floral Market, Milaeger's, Miller's Flowers, O & H Bakery, Personal Touch Flowers by Julie, the Racine Heritage Museum, Uncorkt, and Wilson's Coffee & Tea; and we thank the Maresh-Meredith & Acklam Funeral Home for their continued sponsorship of ticket production costs.

I hope this gives some idea of the complex and extensive work required by the various aspects of mounting the tour. We thank, especially, Vivian Merlo, who has chaired or helped to manage the tour for several years now. Vivian has been concerned for some time to make room for others – but since no one can simply jump in and run the tour without experience, she suggested spreading the learning experience by having a committee this year, which she helped to guide. Soon, we will be digesting that experience and seeking to distill it out into an informal timeline that lists the gate-keeping events and dates, and fills in the various tasks around them. Then the new chairs or committees can make informed decisions ahead of time, rather than on the fly as the need arises. I'm looking forward to many more years of tours, as we go from strength to strength.

Photo credit: Jon Eeg

Another development is the opening of the new West Sixth Street bridge. There was widespread distress when it emerged that it had to come down for safety reasons, but the City generously held open meetings and listened to people's concerns and the historic importance of the bridge to Racine itself. They promised ("if possible") to produce a new bridge that would acknowledge the previous design, rather than the severe project they had originally envisaged. We wrote about this in the Winter 2016 Newsletter. When we saw the new bridge, we were delighted to see that the City had come through with something very close to the proposed design, and had included more reproductions of the original winged dolphin decorations than expected. It looks lovely in its cleanly landscaped environment, and there will be displays coming soon to showcase the history of the bridge and location. Our thanks and appreciation to the City!

Beth Roesler, Preservation Racine's Treasurer, is updating contact information for our members. Please contact her at (262) 488-2874 or casebeth10@hotmail.com to update your contact information.

On other matters, I need to make an addendum to our article about the dollhouse that we included in our most recent newsletter. That dollhouse is a close copy of 1144 Main Street (south), which was the longtime home of Pat and Richard Murphy, who cherished it, over the years, and its belvedere became the logo for Preservation Racine. The home has now been the long-term home of Porter and Maggie Venn, who renovated it from bottom to top, and it now has a new owner, to whom we wish the very best.

Photo credit: Pippin Michelli

Finally, just this week, I was in the newly refurbished Area Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, and must let you know how beautifully it has been done! It is warm and comfortable, very professionally laid out, and a pleasure to use!

So, we have had a rich and fulfilling quarter, and it is a delight to be able to tell you about it!

Pippin Michelli

Photo credit: Jon Eeg

MADE IN RACINE – SHOES

Did you know that about 98% of all shoes sold in the U.S. are now manufactured overseas, and most of them are made in Chinese factories? Well, it wasn't always that way, however. Many years ago, just about ALL of our shoes were made in America, with just about every large city having shoe factories. Racine was certainly no exception, since we once had several shoe factories that flourished here at one time. Racine is known for having a rich industrial history, and it may surprise you to know that many unusual products were made right here, including shoes!

Image source: Jim Mercier

The earliest known Racine manufacturer of shoes was a German immigrant named Joseph Miller. (Past president of Preservation Racine, Pat Murphy, is the great granddaughter of Joseph Miler.) In 1857, the Miller Shoe Company. was established with only three employees. The business proved to be very successful. However, when the "Great Fire" of 1882 swept through our downtown area, his factory was completely destroyed. Miller then constructed a large brick building at Third Street and Lake Avenue, and within a few years, employed about 375 workers.

Image source: Jim Mercier

Another early Racine shoe factory was established in the late 1850s by John Beck. According to early reports, Beck arrived in Racine penniless and began to repair shoes in order to make a living. He invested his profits in shoe leather and eventually started his own shoe manufacturing business. These early shoe factories had much in common with each other … all of the shoes made here were hand-sewn from leather processed at tanneries already established in Racine. Other shoe factories were started in Racine following the success of Miller and Beck. The Fiebrich, Fox, and Hilker Shoe Company operated in a

building located on West and Garfield Streets, just west of the tracks. That building is still standing. A few other shoe manufacturers that called Racine home were the Monarch Shoe Company, the Shaw Shoe Company, and the Davies Shoe Company. All of the above-mentioned manufacturers produced LEATHER shoes for men. However, a few Racine companies even manufactured shoes made of METAL soles ... both steel and aluminum. I know what you're probably thinking ... who would want to buy METAL-SOLED shoes? Actually, quite a few people!

Image source: Jim Mercier

The Racine Aluminum Shoe Company introduced a rather unique innovation ... the aluminum-soled shoe. These shoes were designed as a work shoe for men who gave their shoes unusually hard wear ... foundry workers, loggers, miners, tanners, quarrymen, blacksmiths, construction workers and even manure haulers (yes, even them!). Besides claiming to be the first manufacturer of aluminum shoes, they also claimed to have the largest aluminum shoe factory in the world! There were also a few other aluminum shoe factories in town, including the Overland Shoe Company, the National Aluminum Shoe Company and the American Metal Shoe Company. Prices for aluminum shoes ranged from $5.50 for a 10 inch "Hi-Cut" upper to $7.00 for a 17-inch upper. Aluminum shoes were advertised as being lightweight, waterproof and would outlast leather shoes.

We also had a STEEL-soled shoe factory here at one time ... the Ruthstein Scientific Shoe Company (a.k.a., the Steel Shoe Company). Back in 1906 Nathan Ruthstein was granted a patent for a steel-soled shoe that was attached to leather uppers by rivets. He advertised heavily to farmers in farm-related magazines, stressing that every job on a farm required steel-soled shoes (yes, manure haulers included!). Of course, the aluminum shoe manufacturers were quick to point out that THEIR shoes never rusted, and were light-weight compared to the steel variety.

Racine's last shoe factory was the Racine Shoe Manufacturing Company, which was located on Mound Avenue and Marquette Street. Organized in 1902, they made a line of high-quality men's shoes. During World War II, this company supplied over a million and a half Racine-made shoes to our servicemen. However, even before the war ended, the company decided to relocate to Holland, Michigan (they had already merged with the Holland Shoe Company a few years earlier), thus ending all shoe manufacturing in Racine. The huge, multi-story building is now owned by Postorino Decorating.

I must admit that I actually tried on a pair of aluminum shoes made by the Overland Shoe Company (couldn't believe they were my size!). They were quite durable, but not very comfortable! Yes, I could walk in them, but there was no "give" in the soles, which made it very difficult to bend over, let alone pick something up. My recommendation? Stay with traditional leather shoes!

Jim Mercier

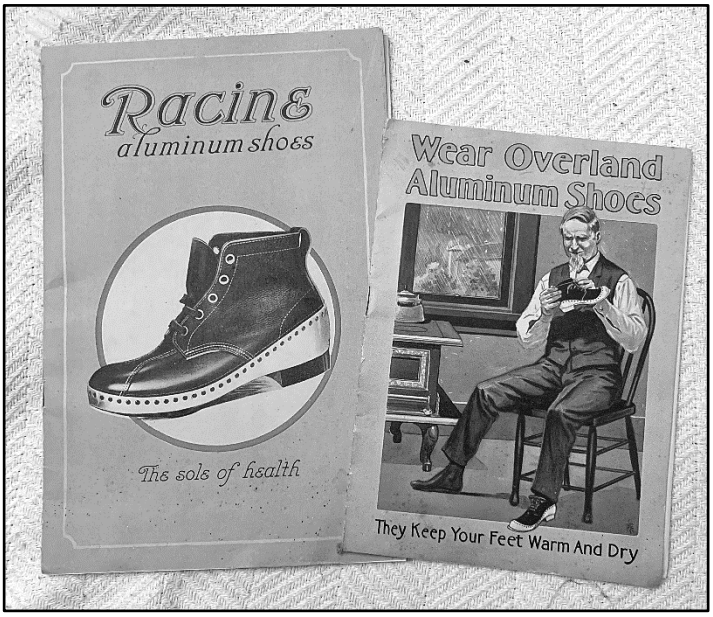


Image source: Jim Mercier

Two Heritage Buildings – Part 1

The two cream brick buildings at the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Third Street have had an intertwined history for 160 years. Today we know the places as D. P. Wigley, 234 Wisconsin Avenue, and Littleport Brewery, 214 Third Street; both are owned by Mark and Christine Flynn. In this newsletter we will look at Litttleport Brewery and turn our gaze to D. P. Wigley in the spring newsletter.

Littleport Brewery sits on Lot 9 and the south 21 feet of Lot 10 of Block 9 of the Original Plat of Racine. The Utilitarian commercial building was originally a livery stable constructed of cream brick, a feature in Racine that is admired and well-loved by locals and visitors alike. It is two stories, with a totally replaced flat roof and a stone foundation. There are few decorative features which make the large, arched painted sign and corner lit, hanging sign more dramatic. The façade also sports a high parapet with a stepped brick cornice and gently arched, hooded windows. The building is eighty-one feet by fifty-two feet, although some reconstruction in the southeast corner has shaved the corner and added an angled doorway. Inside two immense concrete pillars support the ceiling and second floor; that industrial look fits well with numerous tall, shiny, stainless steel tanks holding fermenting beer. The enormous I-beams running across the room over the bar were salvaged from the Porter's Furniture Store demolition. The wood used on the sides of the bar are hardwood floor boards from the second floor. Floor to ceiling, wall to wall, triangular timber trusses that held up the roof are no longer necessary, impressive as they are, they will someday have to be removed to repurpose the second floor. Two large hanging barn doors still hang on the east side of the building facing the alley. A new cement threshold has been decorated with horseshoes.

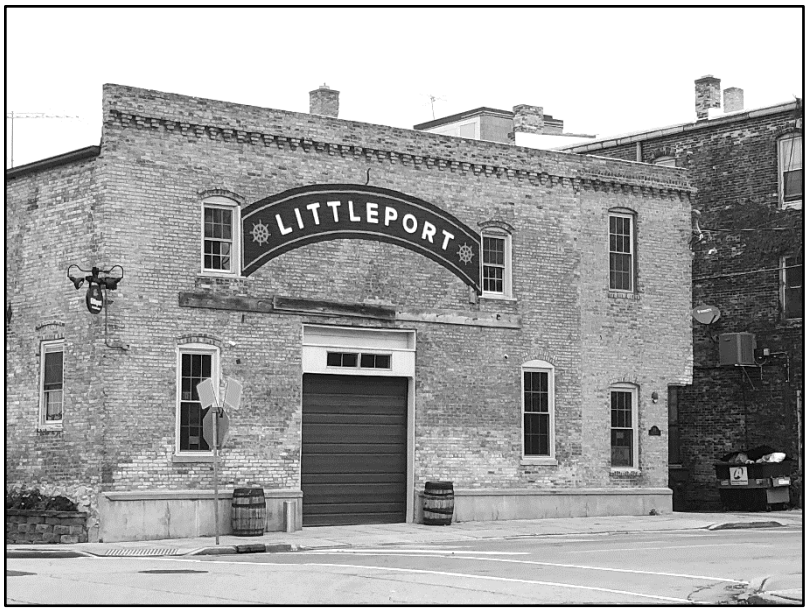


Photo credit: Debbie Yale

Gilbert Knapp's land claim made him the first white owner of the property. The parcel was sold four times between 1839 and 1849. In 1860 and 1861 owners there were losing the property to people who could pay the back taxes. By December of 1865 William H. Lathrop acquired the building. He was a grain dealer and commissioned merchant (arranged shipping of merchandise). A few months earlier he had purchased the large warehouse across Wisconsin Avenue, with the only elevator in this part of the country, from Reuben Norton's and Henry S. Durand's company called Norton & Durand Co. It was situated on Lots 7 and 8 of Block 10 of the Original Plat (where D.P. Wigley now stands). I could not determine if Lathrop built the livery stable that operated on the northeast corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Third Street, but I think it likely he did since the oldest city directories dated 1852, 1858, 1862 and 1867-68 did not list a livery stable at that corner. Plus, one of the first operators of the livery, William Sumner, was a train conductor in 1862.

At the end of June in 1870 a fire, the second in two days in the immediate area, engulfed the Lathrop grain elevator and rapidly spread across Wisconsin Avenue to Sumner & Bassinger's Livery Stable, still owned by Lathrop. Three dwellings, numerous barns, sheds and outbuildings were also destroyed; the back of four stores on Main Street were on fire, but were saved.

Both of Lathrop's wooden buildings were reported to be total losses in the newspaper; they were replaced with the cream brick buildings we know today. D. P. Wigley Company owner Mark Flynn says there are numerous signs of fire in his building where timbers have been blackened and tar melted. So, it appears only above ground floors were completely burned. Sumner & Bassinger rebuilt their livery stable and continued their business until Bassinger left in 1873. Sumner went on with different partners. Lathrop sold the property to Mary Sumner, wife of William, in June of 1878 for $800. This may have been the last payment of a land contract as an article in the

Racine Journal of July 27, 1870 says Sumner & Bassinger were compelled to rebuild their livery stable with brick, but a "hurricane blew it to the devil" when half complete. The Sumners leased the building to numerous livery stable businesses from 1879, until it was sold to Peter C. Christianson in 1889 for $3,500. Christianson sold two years later to Louis Klein. He remained in business until he sold to Edith Simmons in 1900, who sold the building for $4,000 to Dr. Shoop Family Medicine Company in 1902.

The livery stable served as a garage for the Shoop company, and for Western Publishing & Lithography Company which was then located on State Street. The Third Street Garage also operated in the building from 1912 to 1944. Dr. Shoop's will allowed for all his property to be turned over to two of friends to continue to manage the property in his estate, and thus to continue to bring in revenue. They were not to sell property unless it was necessary to continue to provide for his wife's home, expenses, maintenance, and upkeep and the monthly payments to numerous relatives he had willed to occur after his death. In 1944, Harold Sporer, the last surviving trustee of the Shoop estate, sold the stable/garage to Herbert Brown of Brown General Tire Company, a tire distributor.

Herbert Brown sold the building to the Journal-Times in November of 1950. The newspaper turned the property over to Lee Enterprises in 1972. Six years later it was sold to neighbor D. P. Wigley Company and it was used as a warehouse. As in 1865 both buildings were under the same ownership.

This continued when Mark and Christine Flynn purchased both buildings in the fall of 1998. They worked on the stable/garage/warehouse for five years installing huge I-beams, concrete floors and pillars, commercial brewing equipment, new doors and windows, a completely new roof, replaced staircase, plus added the bar, plumbing, bathrooms, and refrigeration. The brewery opened on April 17, 2021. They typically have 20 of their own brews on tap with guest craft beers rounding out their offerings. There are special events held in the brewery including beer tastings. I suggest going down to Littleport and getting a flight and having your own tasting event. Littleport Brewery is a great addition to downtown and it is a great place to go over the holidays when family and friends are in town!

Debbie Yale

Guess Who's Retiring?

At the end of the year, Rochelle Pennington is hanging up her microphone to take advantage of warmer climes in the winter. We are so lucky to be able to welcome her to our December Preservation Racine membership meeting one last time before we lose this gem of a presenter.

Her topic will recall the World War I Christmas Miracle. She is an extremely talented entertainer who has greatly delighted us in the past. You really don't want to miss this presentation even if you already know the story. Her program covers the battlefield story of the spontaneous "truce" that occurred on Christmas in 1914, a time when the world seemed to be at odds with itself.

Rochelle will cover the story in detail using written diaries of those involved as well as newspaper articles and letters to round out the Power Point presentation.

Free for members. $5.00 for guests.
Light refreshments will be served. A cash bar will be available. Easy parking is available at the Yacht Club.

If you have any questions, please contact Linda Schubert at 262-632-7537 or at lindaschubert42@icloud.com.

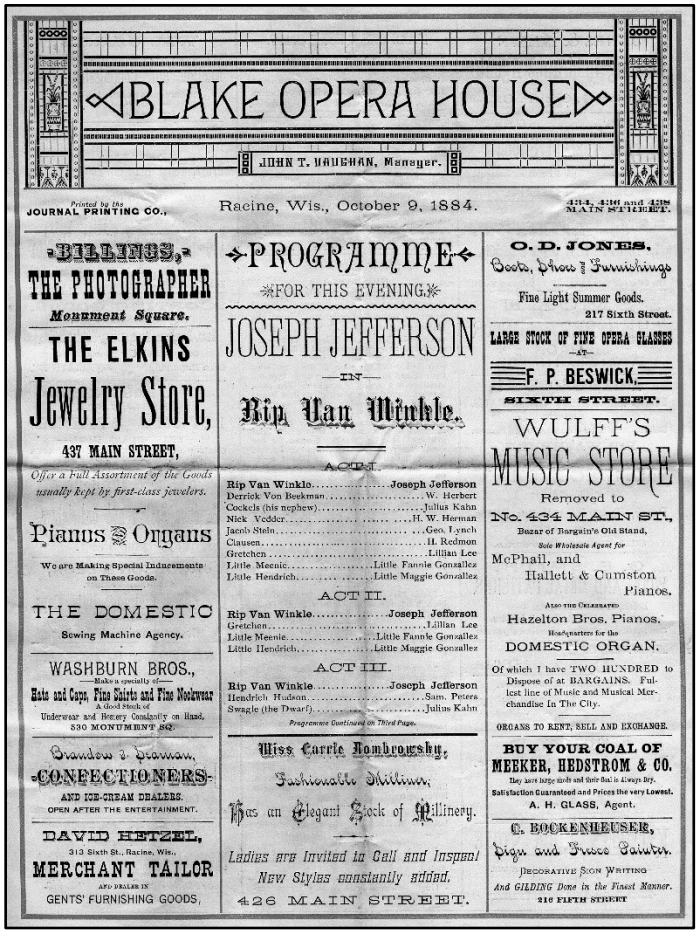
A Review of Preservation Racine's November Membership Meeting held at 314 to 324 Sixth Street

On November 7, 2022, more than seventy Preservation Racine Members met at a cozy and warm venue located in the former YMCA building (now referred to as the old Red Cross Drug Company). Joan Rohee is owner of the establishment Social on Sixth located in a corner storefront on the first-floor section of the building. She welcomed us and contributed to a presentation by Linda Schubert which centered on the two buildings that bracketed 1884 and 1886. The ruins of the fire-gutted, once beautiful Blake Opera House and Hotel stood at the northeast corner of Sixth Street and College Avenue where the substantial and grand former YMCA building stands today, a proud lady of 1886.

When Racine was barely fifty years old, it was fortunate enough to have one of the loveliest theaters in the country. When fire demolished this enchanting structure,

it lay in a disarray of charred bricks, broken glass and soggy silk draperies for two years. Much has been written about the fire and elegant building that served the elite and the common man for the brief two-year period it existed. And even more has been examined about the life of Lucius Blake for whom the Opera House and Hotel were named. His life was important to Preservation Racine board members because Preservation Racine headquarters and archives are housed in his former family home called the Blake House.

Linda outlined the time period when the soon to be opera house idea was first conceived through the negotiations that took place to erect it. It held up to 1200 patrons and was a six-story structure. The grand auditorium was entered through double doors on College Avenue. Chicagoan James M. Wood served as the architect and manager when it opened. It was an era of opulence for the fledgling city.



BLAKE OPERA HOUSE

JOHN T. HAUGHAN, Manager.

Printed by the JOURNAL PRINTING CO., Racine, Wis., October 9, 1884. 413, 415 and 417 MAIN STREET.

BILLINGS, THE PHOTOGRAPHER
Monument Square.

THE ELKINS Jewelry Store,
437 MAIN STREET,
Offer a Full Assortment of the Goods usually kept by first-class jewelers.

Pianos & Organs
We are Making Special Inducements on These Goods.

THE DOMESTIC
Sewing Machine Agency.

WASHBURN BROS.,
Makes a specialty of
Hats and Caps, Fine Shirts and Fine Neckwear
A Good Stock of Underwear and Hosiery Constantly on Hand.
530 MONUMENT SQ.

Brandow & Beaman,
CONFECTIONERS
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DAVID HETZEL,
313 Sixth St., Racine, Wis.,
MERCHANT TAILOR
AND DEALER IN
GENTS' FURNISHING GOODS,

PROGRAMME
FOR THIS EVENING,
JOSEPH JEFFERSON
IN
Rip Van Winkle.

ACT I.

Rip Van Winkle	Joseph Jefferson
Derrick Von Beekman	W. Herbert
Cockels (his nephew)	Julius Kahn
Nick Vedder	H. W. Herman
Jacob Stein	Geo. Lynch
Clausen	H. Redmon
Gretchen	Lillian Lee
Little Meenie	Little Fannie Gonsallez
Little Hendrich	Little Maggie Gonsallez

ACT II.

Rip Van Winkle	Joseph Jefferson
Gretchen	Lillian Lee
Little Meenie	Little Fannie Gonsallez
Little Hendrich	Little Maggie Gonsallez

ACT III.

Rip Van Winkle	Joseph Jefferson
Hendrich Hudson	Sam. Peters
Swagle (the Dwarf)	Julius Kahn

Programme Continued on Third Page.

Miss Carrie Tombrowsky,
Fashionable Milliner,
Has an Elegant Stock of Millinery.
Ladies are Invited to Call and Inspect New Styles constantly added.
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Sign and Fresco Painter.
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216 FIFTH STREET.

Opera companies and theatrical troupes from as far away as New York City were signed on to offer first-class entertainment to audiences. An explosion possibly caused by the furnace flues set the building ablaze, and the whole establishment collapsed within twenty minutes. There were three losses of life attributed to the fire.

A stunned citizenry took a breather from this gigantic debacle to decide what to do with the plot of land. In 1886, the YMCA took charge and erected a very large three-story building that contained a gymnasium on the second and third floors and a swimming pool and Turkish baths below ground. It was designed by James Gilbert Chandler who also did the drawings for Lorenzo Janes School on Main Street. The YMCA remained in place until 1960 when it was sold and remodeled into apartments and businesses. At that time, the gymnasium became a ballroom with a crystal chandelier. The ballroom remains although it is not in use. Thank you to Judith Schulz for supplying information about her great-grandfather Andrew C. Kappel who performed some of the renovation work and Jim Mercier who brought some period memorabilia. In addition to the Red Cross Drug Company, it has housed the Knights of Pythias, the Sixth Street Theater and other local merchants through the years. Mrs. Emily Hill owned all the property for a number of years until it was purchased by present owners Andy Meyer and Chris Hefel in 2016. Thank you, Joan, for letting us use your wonderful venue.

Linda Schubert

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

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Treasurer	Beth Roeseler
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NEWSLETTER

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Debbie Yale	Barbara Walter

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www.preservationracine.org

Thank you for your continued support of Preservation Racine

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

- ***Newsletters*** tell you about the history of buildings and people in Racine County.
- ***Programs*** take us to interesting buildings, churches, schools and county barns.
- ***Century buildings*** are celebrated each year during National Preservation Month in May. Since we launched this initiative 1988, we have honored more than 400 buildings in Racine County.
- ***Tour of Historic Places*** is possibly our most popular annual event.
- ***Preservation,*** including that of the Blake House, which now has a secure future, having been purchased by Preservation Racine and re-designated as a local landmark under Racine's Landmarks Preservation Ordinance.

Please help us pursue our mission, which is to identify and promote the preservation of buildings and districts with historical and architectural significance, encourage cooperation with other groups and organizations, serve as a resource and archive and encourage community pride.

The importance of our community preservation initiatives has never been more apparent. The value of significant historic buildings could translate into development of our environmental and economic sustainability.

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

Sincerely,

Marcia Pfost

Membership Chair

Membership renewals are due in March each year, except for Lifetime Memberships. The label on the front of the newsletter shows your membership expiration date. To renew and invest in your community's preservation, please fill out the form below.

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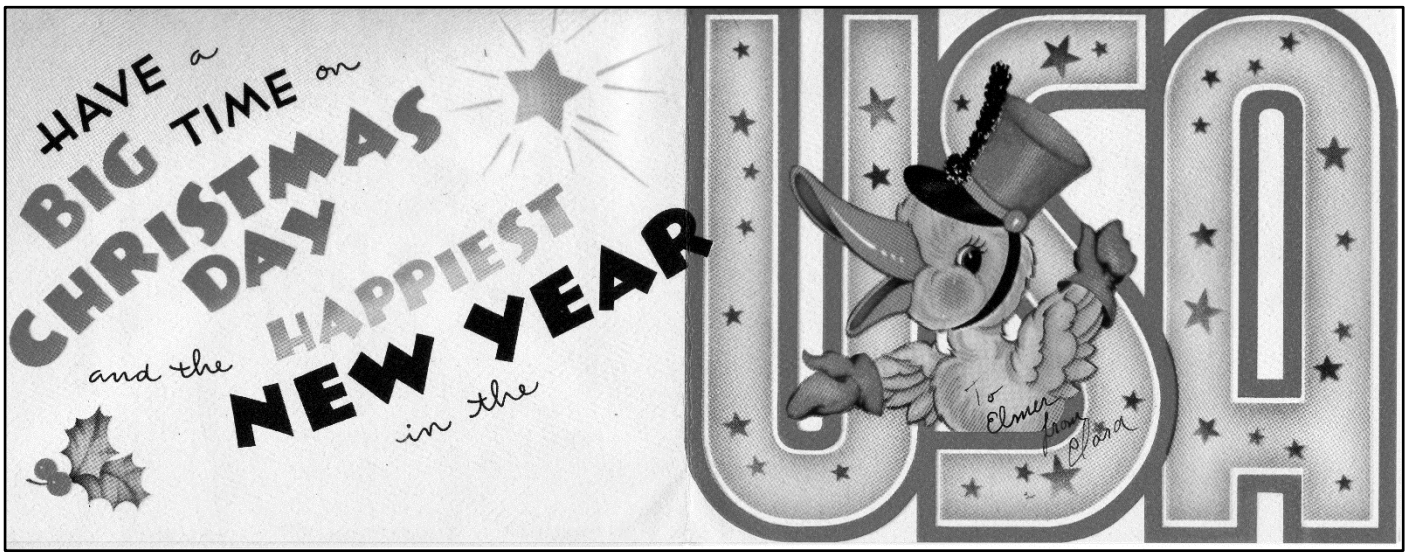
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