PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

SPRING 2023
Volume 30

An Historic Corner

Originally established as a German-speaking congregation which met above a building on North Main Street, then in parishioner's homes, followed by a schoolhouse on College Avenue and Seventh Street, what began as the Salem Church became the First Evangelical Church. In 1848, the same year that Racine became a city, a small house of worship was constructed on Chippewa Street (now Park Avenue) between Seventh and Eighth Streets, replaced by a larger structure on the same site in 1868. Later mergers resulted in a name change to First Evangelical United Brethren Church during the 1940s and ultimately to the First Evangelical United Methodist Church in 1968.

In June of 1951, the dedication ceremony was held for a new church building, located at 212 Eleventh Street, formerly the site of the Erskine-Crosby Mansion, was held. The 152 foot by 80 foot structure of Lannon stone was designed in the English Gothic style. Hugo C. Haeuser was the architect. Inside, stone columns supporting masonry side aisle arches which carry solid timber trusses reflect the exterior English Gothic theme with walls finished in cementry and weigh-lite blocks. Magnificent stained-glass windows grace three sides of the sanctuary--The Life of Christ and the church year on the south, the Ministries of Christ on the north, and on the east a large window including Star of Creation and Light of the World along with religious figures and symbols. The Wadewitz Memorial Organ, designed for the church and built by M. P. Moller, Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland was completely refurbished in 1998, including over 2000 pipes and the interior console. Seating capacity totals 510, with 350 in the nave, 60 in the chancel and 100 in the balcony. A chapel used for special services also has stained glass windows and seats 55. The Infant's Nursery, originally a children's chapel, is located in the West Wing along with Sunday School rooms and offices. On the upper level are a Fellowship Hall/Gym, a kitchen, classrooms for adults and young people, and the Sanctuary Balcony. The lower level contains a classroom and the pastor's office.

Image courtesy of Margo Drummond.

Hanging in the Memorial Lounge on the main floor is a rendering of the Erskine-Crosby Mansion which was torn down to accommodate the church. Said to have been designed by a French architect in 1870, and built by Edward Townsend Mix of Milwaukee, the chateau-like stone mansion became the home of M. B. Erskine, vice president of the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company, his wife, and their three

children upon its completion in 1877. The cost was $21,000. The 26-room edifice with its multiple towers, dormers, and bays enhanced with ornamental iron work occupied one fourth of a block. Eleven fireplaces of imported marble and tile, 61 hand-carved doors of butternut and mahogany (some five and a half inches thick), birds-eye maple shutters and walnut floors added to the richness of the interior. Emma Erskine Crosby, who inherited the property, would often entertain at elaborate garden parties held on the lawn, where trees from various foreign countries provided shade. In 1939 the mansion was sold to a developer. Proposals for use of the property never materialized and in May of 1949 demolition began, leaving only a large black fence stone as a remnant of the once opulent past.

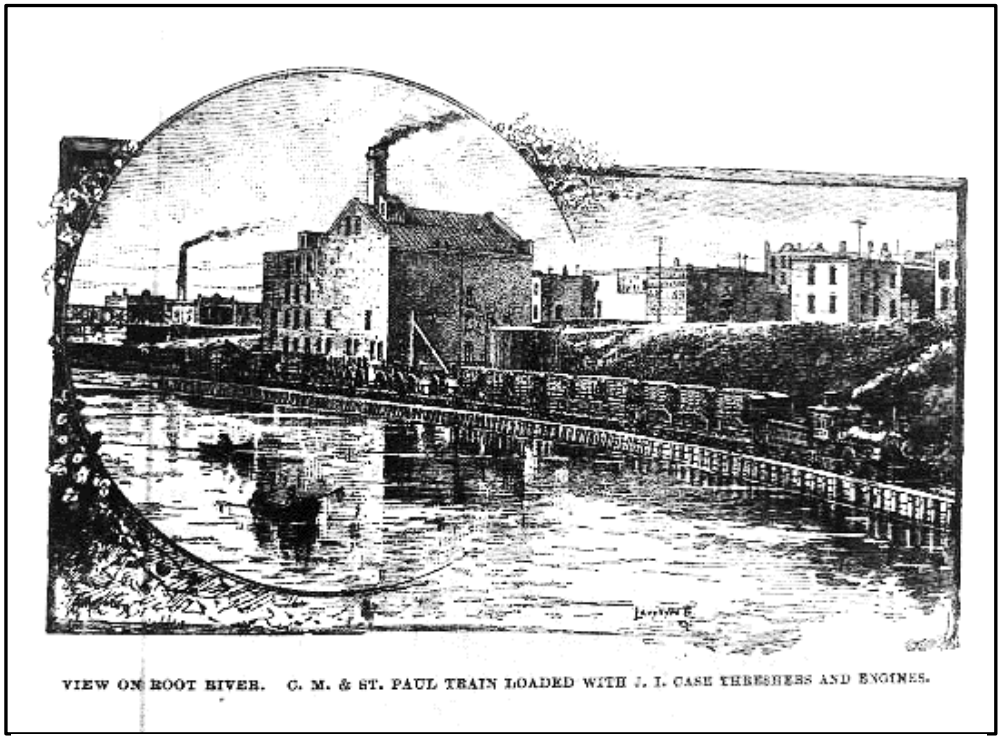
Margo Drummond

Two Heritage Buildings Part II
D. P. Wigley Company

The looming cream brick building at 234 Wisconsin Avenue, D. P. Wigley Company, stands on the east side of the winding Root River on the parcel consisting of Lots 5 through 8 of Block 10 of the Original Plat of the Village of Racine. Lorenzo Janes owned the land and began selling lots in spring of 1840. There were numerous sales of each lot to some notable early Racine businessmen, such as Charles and Truman Wright, Jacob Barker, George Bull, Henry Durand and Reuben Norton. Durand and Norton acquired the two southernmost lots, 7 and 8, in 1848 and 1849.

By 1850 the Norton Durand Company erected and operated a warehouse on most of the parcel. In 1853 an addition was added to the warehouse which then fully occupied Lots 7 and 8. At this time Henry Durand was involved in getting Legislative approval for a railroad line which would run along this stretch of the Root River. He became president and a director of the Racine, Janesville & Mississippi Railroad Company. Numerous successful Racinians invested heavily in this project, not the least being Henry Durand. The company's former treasurer had embezzled $134,000 and a $7,000 bond came due and was unable to be paid. Current owners Mark and Chris Flynn own a letter from Henry Durand to William H. Lathrop asking him to put in another $10,000, over the $80,000 Durand had added to keep the company afloat. However, the small line went bankrupt and investors lost everything they invested.

From 1858 through 1860 there was a great deal of financial wrangling, buying and selling portions of the property, eventually culminating in a Sheriff's sale of Lots 7 and 8. A lawsuit with many defendants including Durand, Norton and William H. Lathrop brought by Washington County Bank, was also going on. During this tumultuous time Lathrop was running the warehouse, receiving grain, mostly wheat, by wagonload and from the Racine Mississippi Railroad, successor of the Racine, Janesville & Mississippi Railroad, and shipping it out on schooners to ports on the Great Lakes, often Buffalo and Oswego, New York. The defendants eventually prevailed which cleared the way for Lathrop to buy the warehouse for $8,500 in September of 1865, and he continued to run his grain dealership.



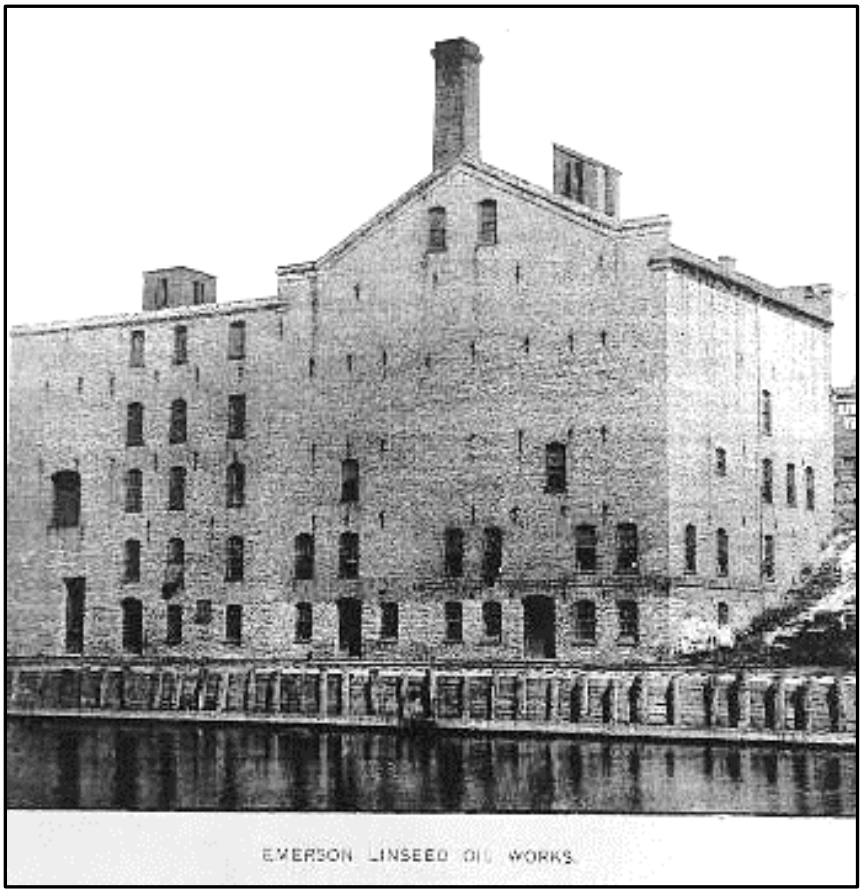
VIEW ON ROOT RIVER. C. M. & ST. PAUL TRAIN LOADED WITH J. I. CASE THRESHERS AND ENGINES.

Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

At the end of June in 1870 the second fire in two days in the immediate area engulfed the Lathrop grain elevator. It rapidly spread across Wisconsin Avenue to Sumner & Bassinger's Livery Stable, also owned by Lathrop. Three dwellings, numerous barns, sheds and outbuildings were also destroyed; the backs of four Main Street stores were on fire but were saved. According to the newspaper, Lathrop's wooden buildings were total losses. In June of 1873 Lathrop sold the grain elevator property to Thomas Emerson and Henry Durand for only $1,200.

Images courtesy of Debbie Yale.

Thomas Jefferson Emerson was born in Maine in 1815. At eighteen years old he began learning the carpentry trade and architecture, but longed for a better education. He attended a seminary for two years, spent one year at Bowdoin College and then studied law. He was admitted to the Maine Bar in 1840. He went west and looked for a suitable place to settle, trying out places in Illinois and Wisconsin. He chose a place called Snake Hollow, which became Potosi, Wisconsin. He practiced law, became president of the village board, got married, and was involved in starting numerous businesses. However, his wife did not like Potosi, so after just three years they moved to Racine. He practiced law here for twelve years and was elected justice of the peace. He amassed $30,000 practicing law and purchased 7,000 acres north of Green Bay before it had been surveyed. He retired from practicing law and built a linseed oil mill above the Root River on the site of Lathrop's grain elevator in 1872. There is a date discrepancy here numerous sources say Emerson built the oil mill in 1872, but the deed says he and Henry Durand purchased the property on June 9, 1873.



Emerson built an Industrial Astylistic Utilitarian building for $16,000. The building has a gabled roof, but sections added later on the north side have flat roofs. The straightforward industrial building was built of cream brick and has a faint Italianate style as seen in the segmentally arched windows, lancet windows in the peak of the gable, decorative brick

stringcourses outlining the gabled parapet, and a heavy corbelling course between the street level story and the second story. Today we see two stories and an attic at street level. But the original entrance was a floor below; the grade of Wisconsin Avenue was changed and the street built up forcing the construction of a new entrance and the porch (note the photographs). At the back of the building looking up from the river bank it rises six stories.

The building had a storage capacity of 30,000 bushels and an annual processing capacity of 100,000 bushels; two presses ran day and night. It was first called Emerson & Company Linseed Oil Works, later it was Racine Linseed Oil Works. In 1874 the building was enlarged doubling its work capacity. A second addition was added in 1875 making it one of the largest linseed plants in the country. Racine city directories from 1875-1879 list Thomas Emerson and Henry Durand as proprietors. In 1879 Emerson's two sons, William T. and Charles W. joined the business.

Emerson bought Durand's interest in the oil mill in July of 1883 for $15,000. On January 1, 1886 his sons bought into the business for $15,000. The oil works was sold to National Linseed Oil Company for $1 in April of 1890. The Illinois company was buying all the oil mills in the Northwest, thirty-five by 1890, to unite them in a stock company and gain control of the industry. Undoubtedly, the Emersons now owned stock in the trust. Emerson continued to manage the company with his son William as the assistant manager. It appears the attempt at controlling the industry eventually failed as the oil mill was sold to the New Jersey based American Linseed Oil Company in December of 1898 for $15,000.

David Paynter Wigley was born in North Wales in 1856; he came to Racine in March of 1881 when he was twenty-five years old. He worked on a Mt. Pleasant farm for a year and went to the public school during the winter. He moved into the city and worked in the wood shops of J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company for the next eleven years. He married Jane Jones in 1884, another Welsh emigrant who had lived in Ohio with her parents. He worked a few months as a flour salesman for Star Mills before striking out on his own as a flour and feed dealer. In 1895 he purchased the oldest flour and feed concern in town, Kent & Smith at 612 College Avenue. He purchased old Turner Hall, 518-520 College Avenue, in 1900, one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the heart of the city and transformed the ground floor into a modern store. The upstairs were improved and called Wigley's Hall, providing a meeting place for lodges and societies.

Wigley first rented the Emerson oil mill as a warehouse and then purchased the building from the American Linseed Oil trust in 1905 for $6,500. He totally remodeled the interior of the six-floor building and equipped it with the most modern grinding machinery works to handle the rapid processing of cereal products. He was proprietor of the only elevator in this part of the country, serving local trade and exporting trainload quantities. He incorporated his company in August 1910 with his two brothers-in-law, Howell Jones and James Fraser. He did a brisk wholesale and retail business in flour, grain, seed and feed, and expanded into building materials.

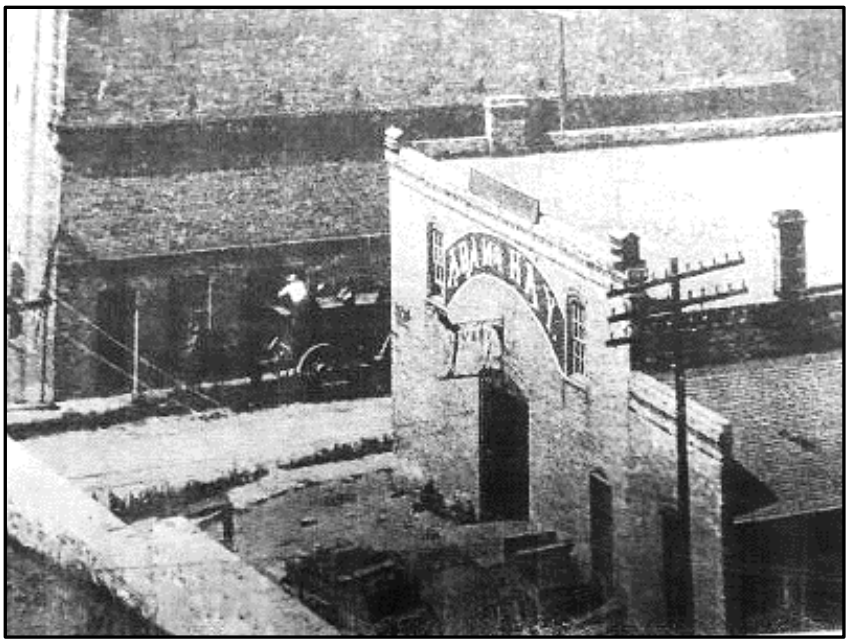


Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

David P. Wigley died on December 14, 1912 after a surgery on his head at 56 years old. His widow Jane became president of the company. After David's death his nephew, Thomas Gleason Morris, lived with and worked for his aunt as a clerk and then salesman. He was married by 1923 and moved out of Jane Wigley's house at 908 Park Avenue. He was mayor from 1939 to 1943, Racine's first mayor of Welsh descent. After his mayoral terms Morris returned to D. P. Wigley's as a wholesale manager. The company started Racine's first ready-mix concrete business in the late 1930s with eleven concrete

trucks. By 1950 after Jane Wigley's death, T. Gleason Morris became president and owner of the company.

Lawrence Hesse and then Lawrence Koleske became president of the business in 1977 and 1981, respectively, after leading an ownership group that bought the firm from the Morris estate in 1977. In October of 1998 Mark and Chris Flynn purchased the building. Gone are the ready-mix cement trucks, but they offer quality service with an easy, old-time country store experience. They continue to offer locally blended feeds, bird seed, lawn seed, bulk garden seed, ice melt, some building materials including Sakrete. In addition, they run a store offering brewing and winemaking supplies and expertise called Hop to It Brewing and Winemaking Supplies.

Debbie Yale

Image courtesy of Debbie Yale.

The Counties in Wisconsin with the Oldest Houses

Our Preservation Racine President, Pippin Michelli, sent me an email this Fall with a discovery she found on the internet: "Counties with the oldest homes in Wisconsin, published by Stacker. She suggested that this topic might be a good article for the next newsletter. The surprise was that Racine was ranked as number four in the state on this list.

The Preservation Racine Newsletter Committee is careful to vet anything that we publish. So, who is this Stacker? Their website says "Stacker delivers expert stories on news, history, and politics in the U.S. and around the world. From military history to climate change, stories use data, historical records, and editorial insight to put the news in context, explain important issues that might get lost in the noise, and show how the world has changed over the years." On August 27, 2022 they published Counties with the oldest homes in Wisconsin.

They reported that 12.8% of all housing units in America were built in 1939 or before. Stacker used data from the U. S. Census Bureau to rank counties. Counties were ranked by median year the structure was built according to 2020 5-year estimates. Milwaukee County was listed as number one, with Manitowoc County listed next, followed by Lafayette County and then Racine County. There is undeniable charm that comes with pre-World War II American Architecture, characterized by high ceilings, crown moldings, hardwood floors, decorative plaster work, intricate tile installation, vast architectural styles and much more. The city of Racine has seven national registered historic districts. They are: Old Main Street Historic District; Melvin Avenue Historic District; Southside Historic District; Rubberville Historic District; Historic Sixth Street Business District; Cream Brick Workers Cottage Historic District and Orchard Street Residential Historic District.

Racine was once known as the "Belle City on the Lake." Preservation Racine exists to celebrate the legacy of those early dreamers, industrialists, entrepreneurs, workers and architects that gave Racine its diverse and unique housing stock. In the early 1970s, national awareness of social issues was developing. The Racine Junior League presented a one-day conference at the Racine Hotel. Following inspirational speakers, the congregants joined small group discussion sessions. Two founding members of Preservation Racine, Pat Murphy and Barbara Walter, were the only two participants who showed interest in the table labeled "Old Houses." Through their efforts, a small group formed, an incubator for what became Preservation Racine. Established in 1973 to identify and actively encourage the preservation of buildings, sites and districts in the Racine area which have historical or cultural value, Preservation Racine will be celebrating our 50th Anniversary this year. We look forward to many more decades of advocating for Racine County's architectural treasures.

Vivian Merlo

From the President

A bit of a quiet winter so far, but we all need to rest!

In December, Rochelle Pennington gave her last presentation at our members' meeting, as she has now retired. She has become something of an institution for our Christmas meetings and we will miss her sorely!

Elections are coming up later this year, and the nominating committee will have a slate to present to the members for first-time consideration at the February meeting, and for the second time at the March meeting. We need to re-elect or replace the Secretary, the Treasurer, and two Directors-at-Large. We will, of course, also accept nominations from the floor. Hope to see you there.

After my recent appeal for volunteers, I am pleased to report that we now have two co-chairs for Century Buildings: Debbie Yale and Vivian Merlo. Meanwhile, I am also looking for co-chairs (or one experienced chair) for the tour. We are lucky in that we already have interest from four or five private building-owners for this year, so the most stressful part of chairing is already largely done! We will need to bring the private buildings up to six, and find one public building to complete the traditional offering for our tours. Finding building researchers is less of a challenge, as there is a core of dedicated people who do this – but we are always happy to take on newbies and hope that people will volunteer for this too. For any of these slots, or to request other positions (except working with the florists, which is already taken), please email info@preservationracine.org. This will automatically come to me and two other board members.

This is our fiftieth anniversary year! Let's make it an especially good one!

Best wishes,
Pippin Michelli

WANTED: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTURY BUILDINGS

Preservation Racine's Century Building Committee is looking for potential candidates for this year's honorary awards. If you know of any buildings or structures in Racine County which are at least 100 years old and still in fine exterior condition, representative of their original style and era, and lovingly cared for, maintained, or restored, please let us know. These awards are a local program recognizing local landmark sites and encouraging their protection and care. The certificate is purely honorary — but a fine honor it is — which recognizes a building's exterior only, and it does not in any way obligate or limit the owners. Over 75% of the certificates awarded over the past 35 years have been for locations within the City of Racine, and the rest are scattered throughout the county.

The Century Building Committee also welcomes new as well as experienced researchers and writers, and we have some knowledgeable and helpful advisers available to guide you if needed. There are many additional opportunities to help with marketing and promotion, event venue coordination, hall setup, decorations, food and refreshments, and cleanup.

This year's Century Building Awards event will be held on Monday evening, May 1, 2023 as a part of celebrating National Historic Preservation Month. We'll meet at the DeKoven Center, 600 Caron Butler Drive (21st Street), Racine, Wisconsin. A reception honoring the owners begins at 6:00 p.m. followed by the program at 7:00 p.m. All members and friends of Preservation Racine are invited to attend.

If you know of a house, apartment building, school, church, depot, barn, statue, monument or other significant edifice anywhere in Racine County, or if you are interested in volunteering to help with other aspects of the event, please let us know. Any pertinent information you can provide, including address, current owners, and architectural, aesthetic, and/or historical significance would be appreciated. Please contact Century Buildings Co-chairwomen, Debbie Yale (262–498–8753, deb.yale5@gmail.com) or Vivian Merlo (262–634–0734, viviang@aol.com) with your information and your own contact information for follow up. Thank you and we look forward to seeing you at the awards presentation in May!

Janet Carter

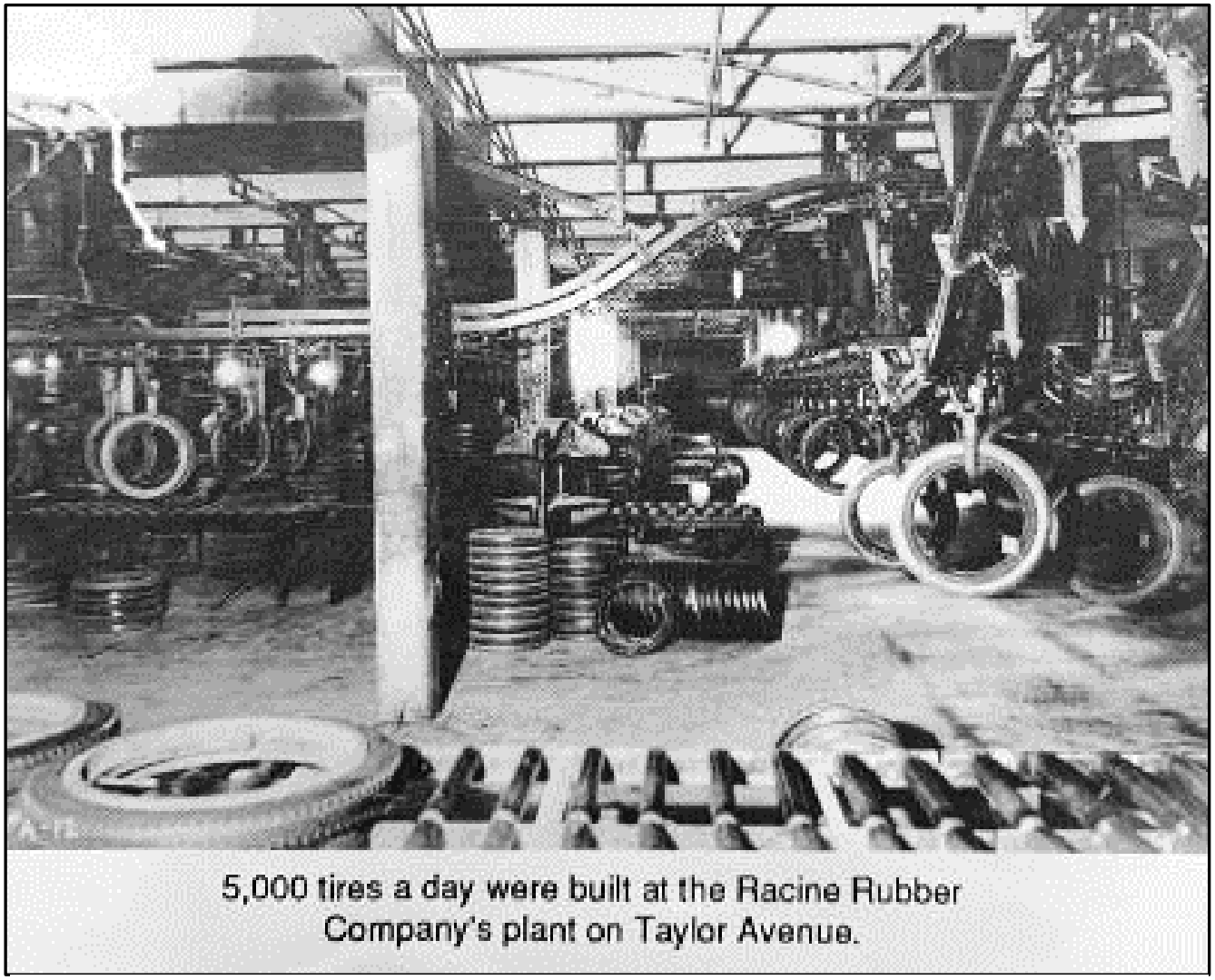
One of our first fifteen Century Buildings, and one of the oldest houses in Racine. Help us find worthy successors to it!
Image courtesy Pippin Michelli

Made in Racine - Tires

You finally realize that you need new tires, but which brand should you buy? Names like Goodyear, Bridgestone, Goodrich, Uniroyal, Michelin and a host of others all seem to be vying for your dollar. Well, if you were around about 100 years ago, there would have been two more names to contend with: the RACINE and the HORSE SHOE tire ... both made right here in Racine!

So, how did Racine get started in the tire business, you may be wondering? Let's go back to the year 1910, when Racine-made Mitchell automobiles were being produced at record-setting levels. Enter Frank Mitchell, vice-president of the Mitchell Motor Company. Mitchell determined that it would be cheaper to manufacture their own tires for the firm's assembly line, instead of buying them from other tire manufacturers. Soon after, the Racine Rubber Company was organized in order to supply tires for the fast-selling Mitchell automobiles.

The factory was located on Taylor Avenue near 18th Street, almost across the street from the old Brannum Lumber Company. Now, some of you may even remember that brick building as the old five-story Kranz structure. Eventually, the plant made more tires than even Mitchell could use. Because of this, they began selling tires to other automobile manufacturers. It was said that at one time, over one-third of all the tires on Fords and Buicks were supplied by this Racine firm. Oh, they even named their tire after their hometown ... the RACINE Tire!



5,000 tires a day were built at the Racine Rubber Company's plant on Taylor Avenue.

Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

Back then, the life span for a tire was less than 5,000 miles, and factories could hardly keep up with the aftermarket demand. The Racine Rubber Company was now producing about 5,000 tires per day while employing nearly 2,000 people. In addition, the company also manufactured both bicycle and motorcycle tires. During the late 1920s, over 400 tire factories were turning out millions of tires for both automobile manufacturers as well as aftermarket users. Competition now became very fierce. In addition, new technology enabled tires to be built with guaranties of up to 20,000 miles. Profits were now dwindling very rapidly, but it was the Depression that dealt the final blow to this Racine firm. By 1930, the Chase National Bank auctioned off all remaining assets of this once-proud company.

Another tire company that called Racine home was the Horse Shoe Rubber Company, which was located at 1215 State Street. Originally known as the Racine Auto Tire Company, they changed their name to the Racine Horseshoe Rubber Company in 1922 to better describe their tires. Five hundred employees were kept busy turning out a very unique tire, to say the least. The Horse Shoe tire actually had small metal “horseshoes” embedded in the rubber. Promises of better traction were never kept, however. It appears that the horseshoes eventually became too smooth, or actually popped out during rough use. They soon switched to manufacturing rubber flooring instead. Oh well, it sounded like a good idea! Of course, their ads claimed that "nothing has been spared, either in materials or careful workmanship, to make this America's premier tire." But our story doesn't end here. How many of you ever heard of "Rubberville"? Of course, you have! The term is used to describe an area of houses west of West Boulevard, along Victory and Republic Avenues. These houses are quite unique, because they are all basically the same (with minor variations) - all two-story duplexes, are close together and situated on very narrow streets. One hundred of them were constructed by the Racine Rubber Company between 1917 until 1920 to provide low-cost housing to their employees. During World War I, defense workers moved to Racine to operate the factories essential for the war effort, thus creating a severe housing shortage. Because of this, the company decided to provide housing as a benefit for their workers, which, were located not that far from the plant. Of course, many were "modernized" throughout the years by adding siding, dormers, and other updates. AND in 2006, this area of unique houses was added to the State Register of Historic Places!

Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

So, the next time your car needs new tires, remember that they were once made right here in the Belle City. Both The Racine Rubber Company as well as the Horseshoe Rubber Company certainly "did Racine proud" by helping to make the "Made In Racine" label known throughout America.

Jim Mercier

Image courtesy of Jim Mercier.

We Remember Pat Murphy

Founding Preservation Racine member and enthusiastic Racine promoter Patricia (Pat) Murphy peacefully passed away on February 4, 2023. She was president of Preservation Racine from 1994 – 1998. In 1998, the silver anniversary of the organization and Racine's sesquicentennial year, she oversaw the transfer of Jordan Hall from the St. Luke's Hospital Trustees to Preservation Racine for our first headquarters.

Pat was born in Racine at St. Mary's Hospital. She attended Racine public schools – Winslow Elementary, Franklin Junior High and Park High - where she was secretary of her 1946 graduating class. Pat continued her education at Northwestern University, graduating in 1950. She then taught American History and English at high schools in Sheboygan and Racine. After raising her family while helping her husband build Miller Brothers Insurance Agency, Pat became a well-known real estate agent. She enthusiastically promoted Racine, welcoming newcomers and often encouraging the people purchasing houses in the Historic Districts to become members of Preservation Racine.

Pat received many honors for her accomplishments. As a realtor, she obtained emeritus status for forty-two years of service. Pat and her husband Richard (Dick) were honored to be members of Century Families as designated by the Racine County Museum. She served her community as president of The Junior League of Racine, Family Services, president of Girl Scouts of Racine County, founding member of the Landmarks Commission, chair of the Monument Square Art Fair, and president of Racine Board of Realtors. She was honored by the Girl Scouts with their Thanks Badge, was awarded Relator of the Year for Racine County and was honored by the Y.W.C.A. with the 2008 Woman of Distinction Award.

Pat was part of the group who set out to save Blake House. The property belonged to Beth Israel Sinai Congregation, which was considering razing the house to expand their parking lot. A coalition of four groups, Preservation Racine, The Junior League of Racine, Racine County Museum and Racine Urban Aesthetics, was formed to save the historic house. On their behalf, Suzanne Foreman and attorney Bob Henzl approached the congregation with an offer to let the coalition rehabilitate and restore the house. In 1977 a 20-year lease was implemented and work began. Blake House, located at 936 Main Street, is now owned by Preservation Racine and serves as our headquarters.

For many years, Pat lived in the beautiful historic house on the corner of Main and Eleventh Streets. The cupola on that house serves as Preservation Racine's logo. Pat hard work and passion for preservation were a gift to the Racine community. We will miss her enthusiasm, warmth and love. Thank you for everything, Pat.

Vivian Merlo

This picture was taken at the Blake House in 1986. From left to right, standing on the floor: Ruta Schuller, Margo Drummond, Fran Trumbull, and Elizabeth Walker; on the stairs, Barbara Walter, Dorothy Osborne, Suzanne Foreman, and Pat Murphy, all members of Preservation Racine when the Articles of Incorporation were signed.

Coming Up

March Membership Meeting
Monday March 6, 2023, 7:00 pm, location TBD
Pippin Michelli will present "The History of North Beach"

National Preservation Month
May 2023

Century Building Certificate Awards
Monday, May 1, 2023
Great Hall at DeKoven Center, 600 Caron Butler Drive

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

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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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