PRESERVATION
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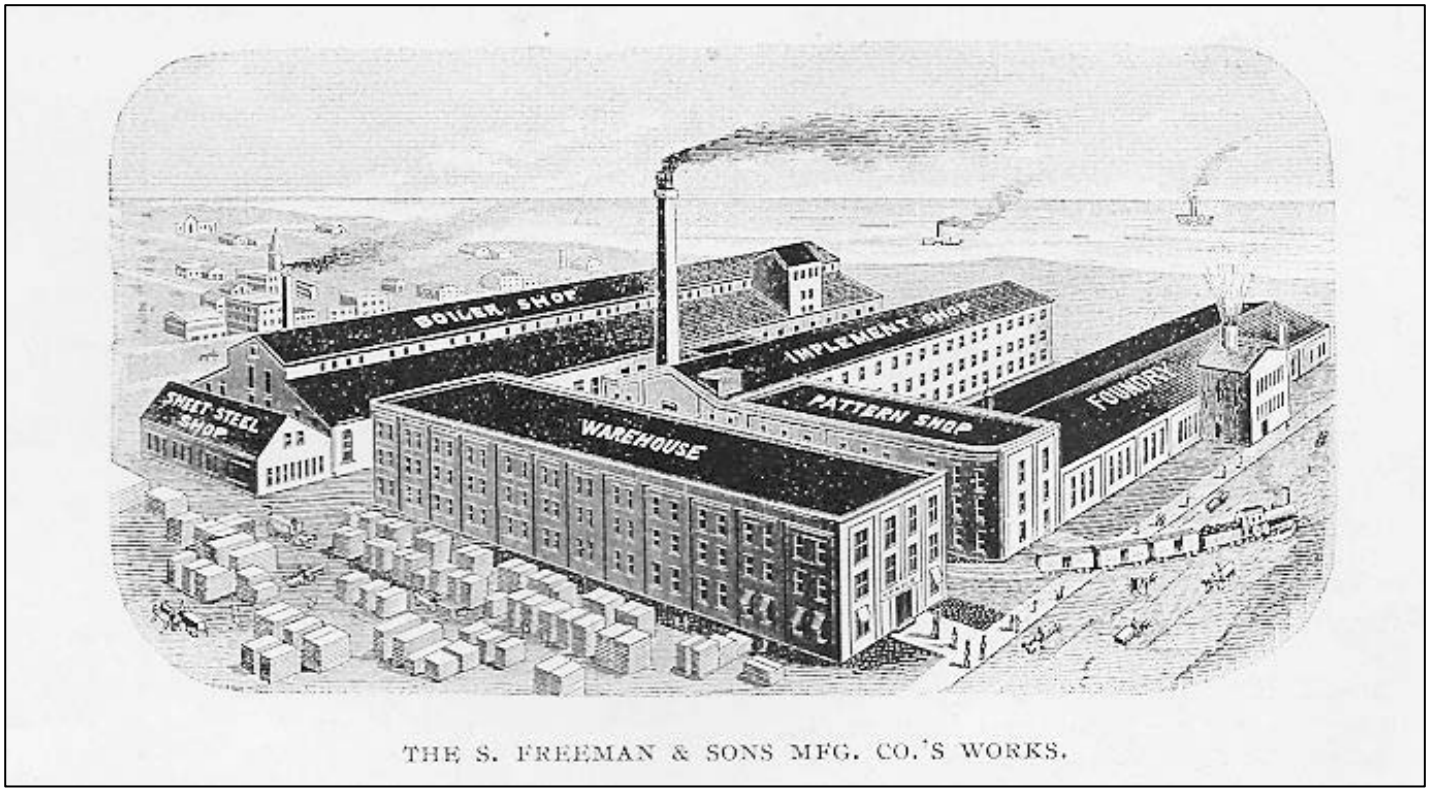
The Freeman Boiler Company

You will read in another article in this newsletter that we are grateful to George Mangold for all of his efforts in decorating Blake House for the Kris Kringle Tour. George was also instrumental in helping us acquire the lions that previously kept watch over the Jim and Roberta Fiene house. They now guard the entrance to Blake House, with George being the major financial donor. George has mentioned that he descends from the Blake and the Freeman families, and that Preservation Racine has not yet told the story of the Freeman Boiler Company. Think of our astonishment when the Gold Medal Loft Apartments were on the Preservation Racine Tour of Historic Places in 2022, and we found an original Freeman boiler behind garage doors.

Cigar Cutter by S. Freeman *Photo: Jim Mercier*

So here is what we have found. In the 1895 *Racine, Wisconsin, Souvenir Edition Headlight (Sights and Scenes Along the Northwestern Line)*, it was reported that "The S. (Stephen) Freeman & Sons Manufacturing Company … are the largest manufacturers in their line in the Northwest." Mr. Freeman was born on December 26, 1834, on the island of Anglesey, North Wales. Both of his parents died within a few days of each other in 1835, leaving Stephen and two older brothers one of whom passed away soon afterwards. Other than Sunday School, Stephen received no formal education, but at the age of ten years, he left the family he was living with and apprenticed himself to learn the boiler trade in the yards of the Chester and Hollyhead Railroad Works. After three years, he moved to Crew and worked in the locomotive shops there, continuing to learn his trade and completing his apprenticeship. He then spent time in the the shipyards at Laird and Sons, served as a mechanic on the steam transport Emelia for nine months during the Crimean War, and resumed his position at Laird and Sons. Hearing of the opportunities for mechanics in America, he emigrated in May of 1856 and settled in Rome, New York, January 5, 1857. Shortly after, he made a tour of several states including Chicago Illinois, then St. Louis, Missouri, and eventually finding employment in Centralia, Illinois, working in the machine shops of the Illinois Central Railroad. During the Civil War, he entered the United States Navy as a boilermaker in the Mississippi squadron and remained in service until 1864, when his health failed. He started a repair shop in Cairo, Illinois, then moved to Milwaukee in the employ of the C.M. & St. Paul Railroad.

In 1866, Stephen moved to Watertown, Wisconsin, forming a partnership with John Kirtland in the boiler making and repair business, eventually settling in Racine and bringing his family. He soon bought out his partner and continued the business alone until 1867, when he formed a new partnership with William Davis until 1869. Stephen set up a small shed like shop on the lake beach repairing and manufacturing boilers. In 1869 he purchased land on Bridge Street near the J. I. Case Manufacturing Company and set up a small foundry and boiler shop. In 1871 Mr. Freeman took a contract to build boilers for the J. I. Case Company to be used on their threshing machines. By 1875 the company had greatly expanded, first by producing fanning mills, then a large line of farm implements. Their Catalog No. 50 advertised "Dependable Farm Equipment," listing the following products:



The Freeman Premises on North Beach, published in the Daily Journal's review of the last 50 years, 1900. *Photo: Jim Mercier*

feed cutters, ensilage cutters, clover cutters, feed cutter carriers, blowing elevators, wood and pole saw frames, grinders, corn shellers (hand), corn shellers (power), fanning mills, end gate seeders, pump jacks, cider mills and fruit presses, cast iron pulleys, wind mills and towers, hand grist mills, hand grinding mills and hand bone mills. In October of 1874 a department was added for the manufacturing of florists' decorative ornamental works, such as flower stands, brackets, window boxes, and aquaria. These products brought awards and recognition both locally and nationally.

As the company grew and his sons grew, they became officers in the company. The company was incorporated as S. Freeman and Sons by 1886, with S. Freeman as President Charles Freeman as Secretary, and Michael N. Freeman as Treasurer. The company needed room to expand and moved to a four-acre lakefront site at the foot of Reichert Court facing Hamilton Street. In 1893 construction began on the erection of a modern boiler plant, followed by foundry, machine, and wood shops. The company completed their expansion in 1898 with the erection of a three-story storehouse and property encompassing about 6 acres. At this point, 250-300 men were employed by the company. Stephen Freeman passed away in 1889 and the company was renamed the Freeman Manufacturing Company. By the 1930s the Depression was taking its toll, and few farmers had the money to purchase new farm equipment. After almost 70 years of supplying quality agricultural equipment to farms around the world, the company closed its doors in October of 1938.

The next time you visit the Racine 6th Street Firehouse Museum; you will find a surviving example of a steam pumper with an original Freeman boiler installed. On July 4, 1857, Stephen married Elizabeth Willich of Pennsylvania, and together they had nine children: Charles, Michael, Margaret, Mary, John, Stephen and Hattie, plus Edward and Elsie – who died in infancy. George Mangold is the great great grandson of Stephen Freeman, great grandson of Michael, grandson of Roy Freeman, and son of Roy's daughter Margaret. George's Aunt Caroline was the granddaughter of Lucius Blake, and daughter of Lucius' son, Adamyra Blake. She became a Freeman when she married Michael's son Frank Freeman. It is interesting to note that both families made their fortunes in Racine manufacturing fanning mills and farm equipment.

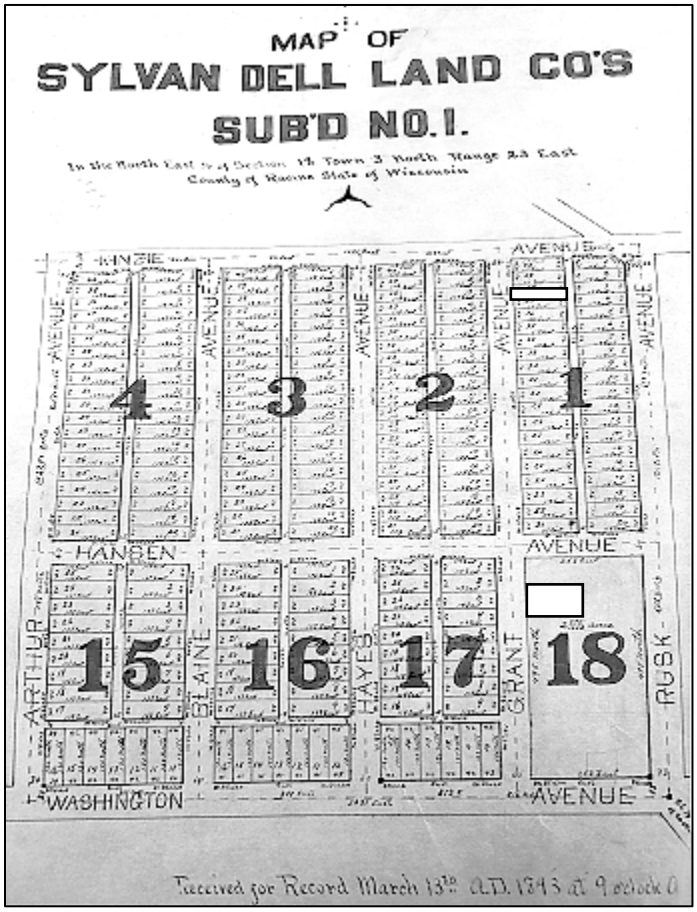
Walker Manufacturing purchased the Freeman buildings and razed all but one of them. That building was called the Freeman Building and was used as a cafeteria and office building, until the company was acquired by Tenneco in 1966. They razed the building in 1984.

Vivian Merlo with Jim Mercier

The Missing Story #3
913 Grove Avenue

This series of Missing Stories are articles on Century Buildings from 2005 that never had their histories told because the 2005 Summer Newsletter was not published. The next chapter of Missing Stories is about a house that was built a block south of where it stands today and whose street has had three names.

The land was part of the northeast quarter of Section 18 Township 3 Range 23 of Mount Pleasant. It is west of Mound Cemetery, south of Kinzie Avenue, east of Arthur Avenue, and north of Washington Avenue (then called Twelfth Street). The northeast quarter was first purchased in 1843 by Edmund Weed from the U.S. government. Ezra Weed sold the NE quarter section to Nicholas D. Fratt in 1850. Fratt and others in the area sold land to a Milwaukee land development company called Sylvan Dell Land Company; the 196.46 acres parcel was platted and then recorded on March 13, 1893, forming the Sylvan Dell Land Company's Subdivision 1. The subdivision was comprised of 8 blocks (1-4 and 15-18). Block 18 with 24 lots was sold to Joseph Lindermann in February of 1894 for $5,000 and became Lindermann's Subdivision. Locals know this block as the location of DeRango's on Washington and Grove Avenue Piggly Wiggly, but before these businesses existed there were houses on the block.



Sylvan Dell Land Company, Subdivision 1, with Grant Avenue running between blocks 17 and 18. This later became Grove Avenue. 1109 Grove Avenue was in lots 21 and 22 (c.1900), and is marked into block 18 with a white rectangle. From 1948, that house was apparently relocated to 913 Grove Avenue on lot 37, block 1, which is marked into block 1 with a white bar.

913 Grove Avenue *Photo: Debbie Yale*

Before there was a Grove Avenue, it was called Grant Avenue, and before that it was Fratt Avenue. The first appearance of Fratt Avenue was in the 1901/1902 city directory; there were residences on the street, but they were not numbered. One of the homeowners was James C. Johnson who was listed as living on the east side of the street either two houses north of Twelfth Street (soon to be called Washington Avenue) or two houses south of Lindermann Avenue. Grant Avenue was used in the 1904 city directory and in the 1906 edition Johnson's address was 1109 Grant Avenue. At the Racine County Register of Deeds office, it shows James C. and Adelfena Johnson purchased Lot 22 and part of Lot 21 in Lindermann's Subdivision, Block 18, on October 2, 1900 for $1,350.

The price of the lot seems to indicate the modest frame house was already there when the Johnsons purchased it. In fact, we have anecdotal evidence that indicates that.

Longtime Preservation Racine member and Racine aficionado, Robert (Bob) M. Johnson, who passed away in 2011, told the original 2005 researcher that the house was built in 1898 since it existed when his father moved into the house. His father was Edgar Johnson, the oldest child of James and Adelfena; he was only four years old in 1900.

The Johnsons sold the house to Murray S. and Sadie Barr in July of 1913. The Barrs sold the property in April, 1924 to Milwaukeean, Charles Speicher. It is likely the house became a rental property as city directories show William H. and Mildred Osborne lived there from 1925 to 1933 and Frank T. and Marion Granger from 1935 to 1945. Speicher signed Quit Claim deeds in September of 1942 to the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad Company. The house was vacant in 1947 and in 1950 there is no listing for 1109 Grove Avenue. About that time there were real estate machinations going on which would result in brothers Earl and Willard Hess and Anthony S. DeMark owning most of the north half of Block 18 and building Hess Bros. Piggly Wiggly Store by 1954.

But what about 913 Grove? It was in Block 1, on Lot 37 of the Sylvan Dell Land Company's Subdivision 1. The company sold many lots, including 33 to 40, to Hiram J. Smith in 1905. He sold some lots including Lot 37 in 1908 to the Chicago & Milwaukee Electric Railroad. The 1919 city directory shows addresses of 901, 909 and 923. In 1920, 905 appears and those four houses were the only residences on the east side of Grove Avenue, south of Kinzie Avenue until the 1950 city directory when Adam and Helen Shoop appear at 913. The Shoops purchased the property from the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railway in June of 1948 for $5,000. The vacant house at 1109 Grove apparently was moved to 913 Grove perhaps by the railroad since they owned both parcels.

Adam Shoop died in 1962, and Helen sold the house in 1964 to Harvey and Rita Deschler. Harvey died in January of 1978 and Rita in December of 2011. Her surviving children, Glenn, Mary L., and Peter J., and three children of her deceased daughter inherited the house. And it is still owned by the Deschler family.

This modest Cape Cod style home has a practical design with a steep pitched roof, rectangular shape, and simple exterior, but is rather asymmetrical which is unusual for the style. It is a one-story house with a finished attic. It is 852 square feet plus 330 square feet in the attic and a roof dormer on the south side. It has an air of mystery since it is not known who moved it and the year it was built has never been proven, but is based on anecdotal evidence.

Debbie Yale

Looking for Century Buildings

Preservation Racine needs your help to find potential Century Building Award recipients for our upcoming May 5th recognition evening. A Century Building is a local honorary designation to recognize the preservation of older buildings which are significant for their architectural, aesthetic, and historical value. We honor buildings which have survived for at least 100 years, lovingly maintained in or restored to fine exterior condition as admirable examples of their past. (We do not inspect or consider the interior, only the exterior as seen from the street.) Since our first awards in 1988, nearly 450 Century Building certificates have been bestowed, about 75% for buildings within the City of Racine and the rest in other communities throughout Racine County.

Please let us know your suggestions for potential Century Buildings such as a house, commercial building, church, school, barn, or other structure. Just provide the address or location as best you can, along with the current building owner's contact information if known and any other helpful details. If you email info@preservationracine.org we'll add your suggestions to our list of possibilities for consideration this year, or perhaps keep them on a watch list for the future. We also welcome additional researchers and committee members to assist with planning and conducting our Century Building Awards celebration. We look forward to hearing from you!

Janet Carter

Kris Kringle Tour

The Downtown Racine Corporation held its annual Kris Kringle Tour on December 14, 2024. Preservation Racine's Project Committee decided to join in on the fun and opened the doors of our headquarters at Blake House, located at 936 Main Street, for the day. Pat Murphy's parlor and library were elegantly decorated for the season by George Mangold, Luann Kohlmann, and Kim Eschmann. Kringle was donated by O & H Bakery and served along with hot cider and coffee. All who came learned a little history about the Blake House and its owners, Lucius and family. For our first time participating, we had wonderful attendance. We sold some of our commemorative Christmas wood ornaments and we also had two beautiful Christmas wreaths and two trees that were delightfully designed and handcrafted by George Mangold. We sold two of George's items and he then donated the proceeds back to Preservation Racine. It was a fun day and hopefully, this might become an annual event.

Beth Roeseler

From the President

Dear Members, the stories of the people who visited or lived in our local landmarks are part of what make the landmarks interesting. A year ago, I was poking around in old issues of Racine newspapers, trying to learn more about the people who lived in the house we bought in 2022. I was amazed when I came across the story of the burglar who wanted the people of Racine to know how unimpressed he was with this community, and I hope you will enjoy reading Deb Schug's related account in this newsletter issue.

Your Preservation Racine Board has been at work over the winter holiday break. At its January 13 meeting, the Board approved a balanced budget for 2025. The organization is financially healthy, though much will depend on ticket sales for the Tour of Historic Places on September 28. Website improvements continue, and we are looking at ways to add a capability to sell Tour tickets and other merchandise on the website. That will help with our budget goals.

Perhaps even more valuable to Preservation Racine's activities and success, of course, is your time. As always, there will be a need for volunteer docents in the run-up to the Tour. But everything else that we do at a Board and committee level also requires volunteer help. I volunteer my time, and so do all the other Board members.

On the schedule laid out in our bylaws, Preservation Racine members at the April 2025 meeting will have an opportunity to vote for the following positions: Secretary, Treasurer, and two At-Large Directors. The input and participation of officers and directors is absolutely vital to our ability to function as an organization, to provide tours and monthly programs, to provide research services, and to publish this newsletter. Personally, I have found the group to be friendly and collaborative, and I enjoy the time spent working with them. But we will always need new people to be a part of this, and I encourage anyone reading this to consider joining us in this way.

The next election for President and Vice President is April 2026. The President position remains vacant and, as Vice President, I will continue carrying out those functions. I am willing to serve more officially as President, eventually, according to the succession plan laid out in the bylaws. But if in the near-term we are able to find someone who will consider serving as Vice President, we can add electing a Vice President and President to the April slate. Filling vacancies at that level, with interested and motivated people, would be very good for the health of the organization.

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Preservationists understand that historic structures can provide a fabric that helps to define the character of a community, each in its own way. Any generation of citizens acts as a guardian for the character of their own community, and chooses what to hand down to following generations. Accordingly, the burning of the Meinhardt mansion (1882) in Burlington on November 22, 2024, hit preservationists in that community hard, and indeed the loss is felt across the county. The fire is being investigated as a criminal matter, and the damage to the property is devastating. The house was built for a prominent family of bankers in Burlington. It was designed by Edward Townsend Mix, the prominent Milwaukee architect who also designed Soldiers' Home in Milwaukee (finished in 1869), Villa Louis in Prairie du Chien (1870), the A. H. Allyn House in Delavan (1885), and the Milwaukee Road's Everett Street Station in Milwaukee (1886, razed 1966). The Meinhardt mansion's porch and porte-cochere were added in 1914 by Racine architects Guilbert and Funston.

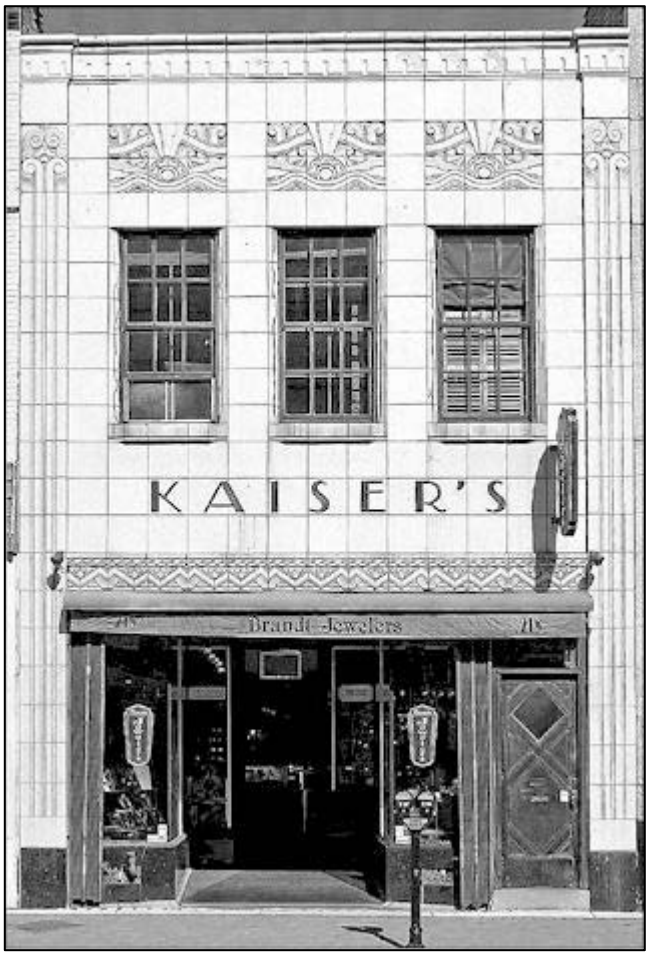
Early in January 2025, fires of a much broader scope swept through parts of Southern California, with significant loss of life and property, and with many survivors made homeless. Some landmark properties also were lost, and so they will not be part of the character of those communities that will be experienced by future generations. The losses included the 1920s Will Rogers ranch house in Pacific Palisades (part of a state park since 1944), the 1887 Andrew McNally house in Altadena, and the 1941 Jewish Temple & Center in Pasadena.

These losses provide an opportunity to look at what we have here in Racine, in terms of what is vulnerable to vanishing. We can't predict which of our landmarks are vulnerable to fire, but there are some that are at a transition point in terms of deferred maintenance, being on the market for a long time with no takers, or having no clear plans for adaptive reuse that will help to protect them into the future. The Board has been discussing this and is considering making a list of local properties that have this sense of vulnerability to them, and then highlighting them in some way. If we made such a list, what would you add to it? Drop us a line at info@preservationracine.org.

Scott Leonard,
Vice President and acting president

Let's Look at our Landmarks! (Part 1)

The Chauncey Hall Building by E. Townsend Mix (1883) at 338–340 Main Street, Racine, (Flemish) Renaissance Revival style.
Photo by Andrew J. Peterman, Creative Commons, BY-SA 3.0



The Chauncey Hall Building (E. Townsend Mix of Milwaukee, 1883), 338–40 Main Street, (Flemish) Renaissance Revival. Built for tailor turned banker Chauncey Hall, three-story red-brick commercial building with restaurant or saloon on 1st floor, offices on 2nd floor, and a hall on 3rd floor. Notice how the identical windows line up in true Classical fashion, while the whimsical curve of the roof line is typically Flemish. The vertical feature at center front is a corbeled-out pedestal with a zig-zagged statue base at the top. Mix added statues on similar bases without pedestals at the Milwaukee Consistory Building, and used the same pedestals to disguise chimneys at the (destroyed) Globe Building in Minneapolis. He enjoyed toying with eccentric but rules-based design elements that stretched the orderly Classical style to its limit. (left).

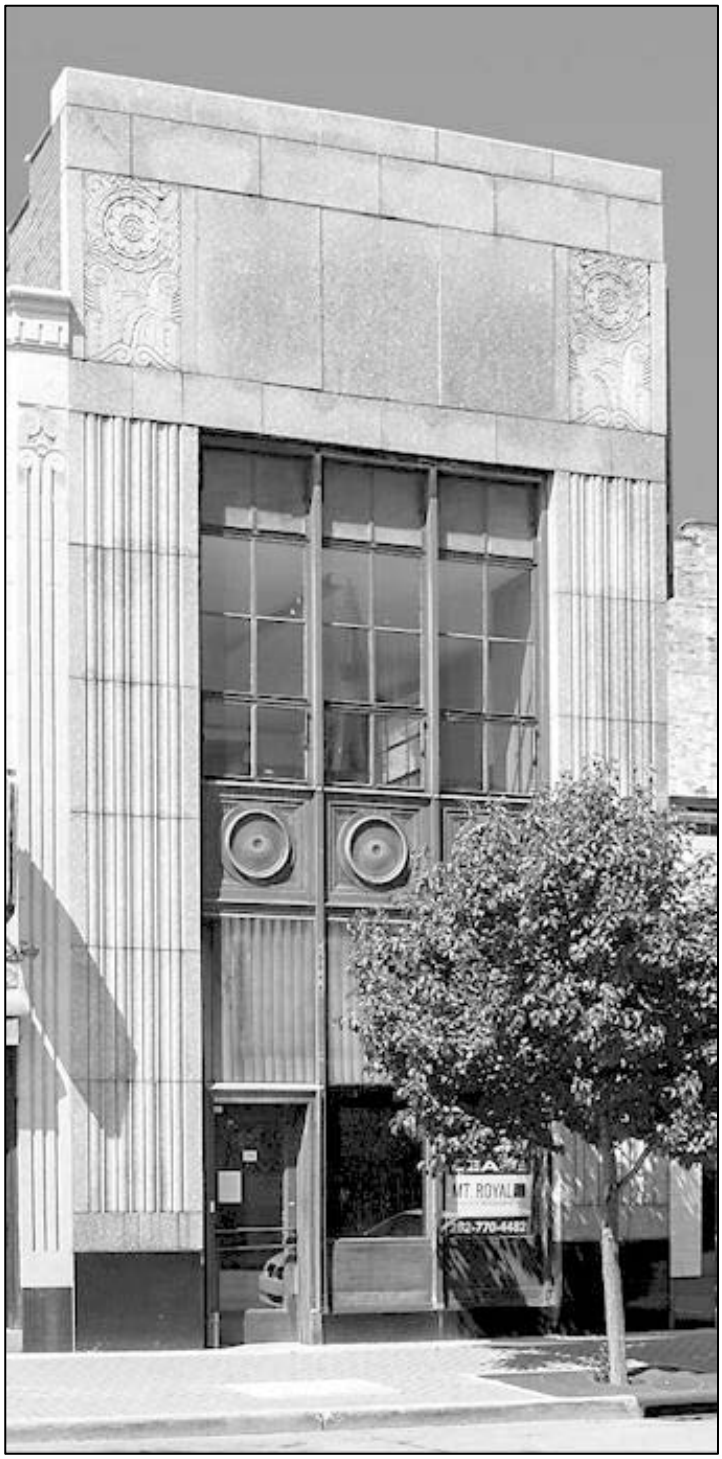
The Chauncey Hall House (Andrew Jackson Downing, 1842–1854), 1235 Main Street South, Gothic Revival. Built for the same Chauncey Hall as the commercial premises on the left, its designer was a nationally significant landscape designer and architect. It is the oldest Gothic Revival house in Racine and is typical of a very American variant of the style with its scalloped barge boards at the eaves, and the square Tudor-style "hoods" over the windows. Gothic in all its variants is "anti-Classical" in type, so its windows rarely line up (below).

The Chauncey Hall House by Andrew Jackson Downing (1842–1845) at 1235 Main Street, Racine, Gothic Revival style.
Photo by Andrew J. Peterman, Creative Commons, BY-SA 3.0

Kaiser's Store Front was redesigned for an older (1887) building by Frank J. Hoffman (1928), 218 Sixth Street, Art Deco style. The façade has been entirely covered in glazed terracotta. Typical of Art Deco, its traditional Classical elements (including the cornice along the roof line, the fluted pilasters at each side, and the frieze above

Kaiser's Store Front redesigned for older building by Frank J. Hoffman (1928), 218 Sixth Street, Art Deco style.
Photo by Andrew J. Peterman, Creative Commons, BY-SA

the store windows) are stylized into geometric patterns and curls, and enlivened with color (taupe, pink, lemon, pale emerald, and amber). The store had been operating since 1914 and continued in business until 1957. It is currently occupied by Brandt's Jewelers, which is now going out of business, so we must look out for it. It is becoming vulnerable (opposite, bottom left).



The First National Bank Trust Dept. by Frank J. Hoffman (1933) at 216 Sixth Street, Racine, Art Deco style.
Photo by Downtown Racine.

The First National Bank building (Frank J. Hoffman, 1933), 216 Sixth Street, Art Deco style. Just next door to Kaiser's, the same architect designed this building in an almost "brutalist" variant of the Art Deco. Notice how the material is a somber gray granite and dark bronze, unrelieved by other colors. And also notice how the fluted pilasters at the sides have been made into bulky behemoths, and the "flowers" in the vast lintel above them are as fat and solid as tractor tires rather than dainty like blossoms. Notice the slender (Ionic style) pilaster of the Kaiser's building to the left next to vast (Doric style) of the First National Bank. Both variants of the style are very suitable for their buildings (right).

Karel Jonas House (1878), 1337 Erie Street, Italianate style with added tower in Queen Anne style. Karel Jonas was a Czech nationalist and exile, a journalist, author, and Racine civic leader, as well as a Wisconsin Assemblyman, Lieutenant Governor, and U.S. Ambassador. His house lacked the tower when he lived in it. The Italianate style is seen here in the large roof brackets and the tall narrow windows topped by with "jack arches" (short, segmental arches). The Queen Anne style often featured circular towers with conical roofs, whimsically modified Classical elements (such as the flattened arches in the second story, and the incongruously dainty Doric porch). With its love of stylistic and compositional variety, it was the perfect style for the added tower (below).

Pippin Michelli

The Karel Jonas House, 1337 Erie Street, main bloc is Italianate style, later corner tower is Queen Anne style.
Photo by Andrew J. Peterman, Creative Commons, BY-SA 3.0

Racine's 1887 Jewelry Heist

On the evening of October 13, 1887, Racine was about to experience a high-profile jewelry heist that would become a sensational whodunit. The scene of the crime was Racine Mayor Daniel A. Olin's house, the cream-brick Italianate mansion on the corner of Twelfth and Main Streets.

According to the *Racine Journal* article published on October 14, 1887, sometime between 9 and 10 o'clock that evening a thief entered Mayor Olin's house and took "considerable property." The only two family members in the house were Mayor Olin's wife Mariette and Miss Belle Storey, described in the article as the couple's niece but was actually Mayor Olin's granddaughter according to Ancestry.com. The mayor had been attending a Common Council meeting at the time of the incident. Miss Storey was first to find evidence of the disturbance when she went upstairs to retire and found the gas had been lit and "things upside down" in her bedroom.

The Chief of Police arrived on the scene and determined from his examination of the premises that the thief could not have climbed upon the veranda and entered through the open window. He concluded the robbery was an inside job, probably perpetrated by one of the house's domestic staff.

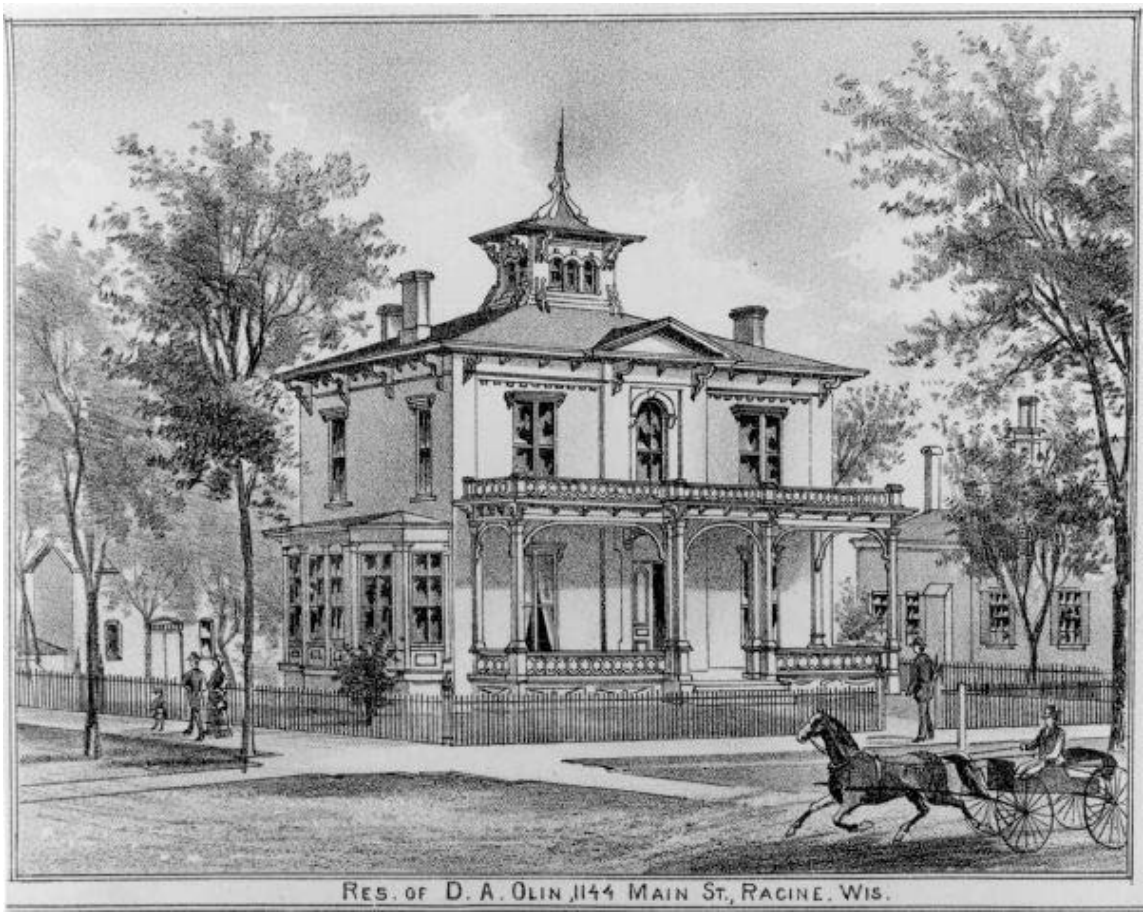
Days later the *Racine Journal* received a curious letter from the burglar himself. What's more audacious than sending the letter is the actual contents of the letter, which the *Journal* printed in the follow-up article. In this letter, the burglar claims to have climbed up thirteen houses in Racine and had only been able to get into two. He also describes where he dropped the jewelry he stole from the Olin house and complains about the lack of goods in the homes of Racine. From the letter, the thief declares, "'If every city in this country was like yours, burgling would soon be a lost art, and in the future I will steer clear of it.'"

The thief goes on to conclude the letter with a flippant statement that reads, "'Give my regards to the Mayor and advise him to leave more money and less pills in reach,'" and signs it, "'A Disappointed Climber.'"

Before printing this letter, the *Journal* reporter went to verify if the stolen goods were in fact left in the place the robber said they would be. They were. A pocketbook, bracelets and a ring that were thrown against the back door of the corner house on Park Avenue and Twelfth Street were recovered and returned to Mayor Olin.

Afterwards, another search was made on the block west of the Olin's residence that found a "pocketbook containing streetcar checks and other articles, a ring box lined with velvet and a glove buttoner." These items belonged to Miss Storey and were also promptly returned.

The reporter even fact checked the burglar's statement about the "pills." According to the article, when asked, Mayor Olin "laughed and said it was true they had a great



Daniel Olin House, c.1889 *Photo: Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-40098*

many pills in the drawers where the thief had searched." The article does not disclose what those pills were.

Since this reporter knew so many details, the mayor thought the offender had been arrested and confessed to the whole incident. Little did he know then that all the information was gathered from a letter and that the burglar was still at large. However, this was not to be the case for very long because the thief was captured in Milwaukee the following Saturday, caught climbing into another residence to rob.

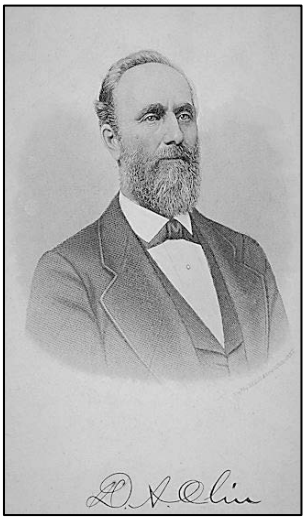
This burglar's penchant for letter writing to newspapers did not stop with the *Racine Journal* as evident from another letter he sent days later to the *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, which was reprinted in the *Racine Journal*. In this letter, he declares himself retired as a burglar and gives details about his plight from an East Coast jail, of which he writes "'I left a quiet Retreat on the banks of the Hudson (Sing Sing) where I had been an involintary [sic] exile and unwilling toiler for a number of years during that time I had dreamt of the time when I should be free, and my imagination Reveled in thoughts of the harvest I would Reap in the "Wild and Woolly West."'

Those dreams did not come to fruition. According to his letter, he says he received "'a fusilade [sic] of shots instead of a boodle,'" and describes his crimes in Chicago, then Racine while passing through to Milwaukee, and eventually arriving in Madison. It is unclear from the article how he managed to be released from his apprehension in Milwaukee only to commit another burglary in Madison.

What is also curious about this article is it doesn't name the offender. So, who was this "Veranda Climber" as the newspapers dubbed him? A short *Racine Journal* article published July 30, 1896, entitled 'Will Steal No More' reports, "Frank Bruce, the Burglar Who Robbed the Olin Residence, is Dead."

The article goes on to rehash the details of the 1887 Olin burglary, but in this account reports the burglar signed his name as "Frank Bruce" in the original letter addressed to the *Journal*. The article states that Frank Bruce died in an Indiana prison and turned out to be "one of the most noted thieves in the country."

Apparently, Bruce never did retire from his burgling "profession" as he referred to it in his letter to the *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*. From the 1880s to the early 1890s, he committed a series of crimes, most notably a daring diamond robbery on a passenger train in the fall of 1892. In this incident, Bruce robbed a diamond



Daniel A. and Mrs. Mariette Teal Olin (2nd wife),
Photo: Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-40098

salesman from New York named G. W. Pollock. Bruce was convicted of shooting, beating, then robbing Pollock of diamonds valued then at $15,000. In today's dollar amount, that sum would be equivalent to over a half million dollars.

Bruce was eventually captured, then convicted in Terre Haute, Indiana. Shortly after being put behind bars to serve a sentence of nine years, he attempted to escape the prison, but was recaptured. Bruce died of consumption while in jail.

This jewelry heist might not be the most noteworthy thing that has ever happened in Racine, but is a colorful example of the stories our historic homes hold within their walls. This one was discovered by Preservation Racine Acting President Scott Leonard, who currently resides in the Olin house. With a little research and access to articles from Newspapers.com, the richness of history comes alive, and these buildings become better storytellers than any bestselling novelist.

Debra Schug

Donations Received

We are pleased to announce that Preservation Racine has received several substantial donations, and we sincerely thank the donors. Two donors who wished to remain anonymous gave us $2,000, and $3,000 respectively. Meanwhile the Charlie Rice Memorial fund has sent us $2,940 (including $900 from Rotary Club Members) and we are still receiving checks for that fund. Charlie's fund is to be put towards the Civil War's Camp Utley marker, which is an excellent use for it as Camp Utley was quite near his house. We ask these donors to accept our warmest gratitude and thanks.

Pippin Michelli

Made in Racine: Fanning Mills

I'm sure that you are all wondering, "what in the world is a fanning mill?" Well, if you were around about 150 years ago and owned your own farm, you would have known exactly what it was. However, before I get into the particulars of what this early-day farm machine did, let's go back to the very early years of Racine's history, when farming was the area's primary "industry". Before the time of the threshing machine, farmers would have to cut their grain using old-fashioned scythes. In order to separate the grain from the stalks, it would have to be beaten using rather large sticks. Some farmers even used cattle or horses to trample their grain. After this process, they would use large wooden forks to lift and shake the grain. The final step would be to blow the chaff (straw, leaves, and husks) from the grain by forcing air through it, a process called, "winnowing" (makes me glad I wasn't a farmer back then!)

Well, as you may have guessed, this proved to be a very time-consuming and tiring process when done by hand. Several farmers knew that this task could be accomplished by a crude machine called a fanning mill, which was a device containing a rotating wooden fan.

Enter Lucius Blake who owned a small carpenter shop located on the banks of the Root River. He had so many requests from area farmers to build these fanning mills that soon he had time for nothing else! He decided to enter into the business of manufacturing these devices full time. Blake didn't realize that this venture would not only be the start of a new industry in Racine, but the start of making Racine an industrial city as well.

The new company soon prospered. Now referred to as "Fanning Mill Blake", his company eventually turned out well over 3,000 mills per year, providing employment for over 50 men. He soon became the largest manufacturer of fanning mills in the world, and shipments were being made coast-to-coast. His export market consisted of Canada, Europe, and Australia.

It wasn't long before a host of other Racine firms began to manufacture fanning mills, capitalizing on Blake's success. Names like A.P. Dickey, E.P. Dickey (brothers who owned their own respective companies), Daniel Bull, Altringer, Johnson & Field, and others became well known. Even nearby Kenosha had a fanning mill manufacturer. Combined, these factories were producing thousands of fanning mills, employing hundreds of men and shipping products throughout the world. The company names were different, but Racine was now known as the "fanning mill capital of the world", a title well-deserved. What Detroit was to the automobile, Racine was to the

fanning mill, boasting more factories than any other city in the United States. In addition, many of these companies expanded into other farm-related products. Feed and silage cutters, milk and pie safes (kitchen storage cabinets with built-in screens to keep the flies out), corn shellers, and other agricultural products rounded out their line. During the early 1900s, farmers began to experience improved farm power and greater mechanization. The once-popular fanning mills were now being replaced by larger machines which were more efficient and productive. Except for the small farmer, fanning mills were fast becoming obsolete. One by one, the Racine manufacturers began to drop from the picture, or relied on other products to keep themselves in business. By 1912 the last remaining fanning mill maker, E.P. Dickey, ceased operations, thus closing the final chapter on this once-thriving industry.

We have an actual working fanning mill located inside the "Spirit of Racine Entrepreneurs Exhibit" at the Racine Business Center on Sixteenth Street. Watch for our next open house!

Jim Mercier

Preservation Racine Upcoming Events

Our programs are a work in progress, but here is what we can tell you for now.

Monday, March 3, 2025: Past President Pippin Michelli will give a slide-talk entitled "All About Ernest Klinkert." Klinkert, whose name appears in several locations around Racine, was a significant resident who gave us the Majestic/Uptown theater (now in poor condition) and left us other structures as well. Jim Mercier will also bring some of his Klinkert Memorabilia to show us.

Also confirmed is Monday, December 1, when we have been fortunate to secure Jessica Michna for another one-woman show. You may remember her from her performance of Mary Todd Lincoln: A Widow Forgotten. She is a wonderful actress who comes with costumes and just enough stage settings to transform the scene into an intimate conversation with you.

So add the following dates to your calendar now: at 7 pm on the first Monday of the month, except in August it's the last Monday. **Dates:** March 3 (see above), April 7; May 5 (Century Building Awards); June 2, August 25 (LAST Monday of the month with tour posters & signs); SUNDAY afternoon September 28 (Tour of Historic Places); November 3, December 1 (see above). (Note: there is no membership meeting in January, July, September and October.)

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

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NEWSLETTER

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If you have any suggestions for programs or meeting locations, please email Linda Schubert linda.schubert@att.net. There are several events in the works which are not yet confirmed, but new ideas are always welcomed for future programs…….

Linda Schubert, 262-632-7537

Thank you for your continued Support of Preservation Racine

(Annual membership renewal is March 1)

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 country barns.
- *Century buildings* are celebrated each year during National Preservation Month in May. Since we launched this initiative in 1988, we have honored nearly 450 buildings in Racine County.
- *Tour of Historic Places* is possibly our most popular annual event.
- *Preservation* this included our purchase of the Blake House. It now has a secure future and has been re-designated as a local landmark under Racine's Landmark Preservation Ordinance.

MISSION STATEMENT
Preservation Racine is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to identify and promote the preservation of buildings, districts, and sites in Racine County that have historical, architectural, archeological, aesthetic and/or cultural heritage. We strive to create, educate and develop public awareness/interest and appreciation of the community/historical and architectural heritage. We look to serve as a resource and repository of historic preservation and restoration information, encourage community pride and promote economic benefits of historic preservation.
Sincerely, Marcia Pfost (262-632-0937), Membership Chair

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