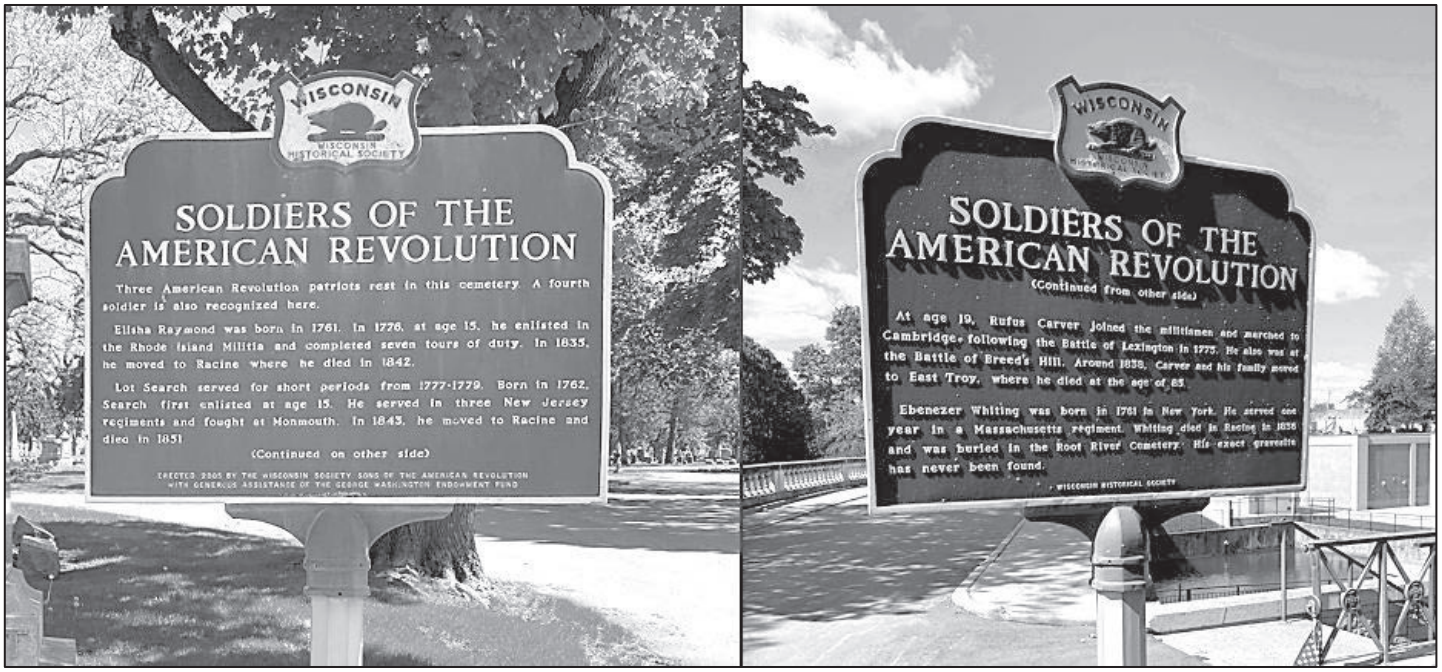
PRESERVATION
RACINE NEWS

Spring 2026
Volume 42

Remembering Revolutionary War Veterans Buried in Racine County

This year the United States of America is celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Fifty years ago, to commemorate the nation's Bicentennial in 1976, the Curator of Research Collections at the Milwaukee County Historical Society, Robert G. Carroon, led the Graves Project, searching for Revolutionary War veterans who had been buried in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Society of Sons of the American Revolution (WSSAR) as well as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) also has assisted with identification, documentation and grave markers over the years.



American Revolutionary War marker, Mound Cemetery, Racine *Photo: Scott Leonard*

Over 40 Revolutionary War patriot veterans have been identified statewide, most of them considered to have been common soldiers, just ordinary men. In Racine County, nine such veterans have been documented (more than in any other Wisconsin county), including four who are memorialized in Mound Cemetery in the City of Racine.

The following grave markers are located in Mound Cemetery:

Ebenezer Whiting (1761–1836) served in the military in Massachusetts for about a year. A brief newspaper death notice described him as having died in 1836 at Root River, Wisconsin Territory, and the register of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) listed his burial as being in the "Root River Cemetery" although the existence of such a location is unclear. The settlement of Port Gilbert (soon changed to Racine) had just recently been established (in 1834), and it was not incorporated as the Village of Racine until 1841. At such an early date, Whiting was probably buried privately on a family homestead. Although his actual remains have not been located, a marker in Mound Cemetery now memorializes him.

Rufus Carver (1755–1840) of Massachusetts was originally a minuteman — a member of the New England militia groups who were trained in military tactics and ready to face any threats "at a minute's notice." He marched to Cambridge after the opening conflict of the American Revolutionary War— "the shot heard 'round the world" at the Battle of Lexington on April 19, 1775.

He soon enlisted as a private and served an eight-month enlistment, including action that June at the battle of Bunker Hill. Afterwards, he responded in August 1777 to an emergency call for forces at Bennington. He then reenlisted for three months, during which his regiment marched to Danbury, Connecticut, for guard duty. After the war, he moved to New York, and in his early 80s, sometime after 1838, he moved to East Troy in Walworth County, Wisconsin, with his family (wife Pricilla Cummings and children). He died at age 84 in 1840 and his grave is marked in Mound Cemetery. However, Racine's first City Cemetery was established a few years later in 1842 (between 13th and 14th Street, from the current College Avenue to Villa Street). In 1851 the private Evergreen Cemetery just south of Racine College was established and used for several decades, although in that same year the City of Racine purchased the first land to establish Mound Cemetery as the official city burial grounds. So, Carver was probably buried elsewhere first.

Elijah/Elisha Raymond (1761–1842) of Rhode Island first enlisted in the militia at age fourteen in February 1776. Amazingly to us, although common at that time, he served multiple enlistments of varying lengths: first for three months, then one month as a substitute for his brother, then two months, then one month as a substitute for his father. In July 1777 he enlisted for three months, in 1781 for a year, and in 1782 for nine months. After that he lived in Rhode Island and Vermont until into his 70s, moving to Racine County in about 1835, where he lived until his death in 1842. He is also buried in Mound Cemetery, although that likewise was probably not his original resting place.

Lot Search (1762–1851) was a New Jersey resident who served for various short periods in different military companies during his teenage years, from 1777 to 1779 or 80. Notably, he served at the Battle of Monmouth in June 1778, when General George Washington's Continental Army fought the British Army. After the war, he moved to Pennsylvania and then New York. In 1843, at age 81, he came to Racine, apparently to join his son John. He died here at age 89 in 1851 and is buried in Mound Cemetery, which was officially dedicated six months later on June 2, 1852.

Other Revolutionary War veterans are buried in various cemeteries scattered around Racine County. The following are in chronological order according to the date of their death.

Aaron Smith (1760–1838) was born in New York but lived in Massachusetts when he enlisted in the militia in 1778. His service included Valley Forge and the battle of Yorktown. After the war, he moved to Foxville (now Burlington) where his family farm included property on Amanda Street. He died in 1838 and may have been buried along his property line there, where Cooper Montessori School now stands. Previous local memorials to him had either been removed or were difficult to visit, so in 2024 the Burlington Historical Society installed a permanent plaque marker nearby. In addition, a commemorative tree was planted, in the spirit of "liberty trees" where war news and information were publicly posted during the Revolutionary War.

Helmont Kellogg (1762–1848) first served in Connecticut and then in New York, including the October 1776 Battle of White Plains, where Washington's Continental Army retreated and escaped from the British, but was able to recoup and keep fighting the war. He came to Wisconsin about 1837 and died in 1848 at age 86. He is buried in the small Sylvania Cemetery south of Highway 11 near Braun Road, along the West Frontage Road of Interstate 94.

Andrew Lytle (1762–1855) was born in Ireland but came to Pennsylvania and then to New York, where he was a major in the New York militia. He moved to Wisconsin in his 70s in 1838 with his son Adam. He died in his early 90s in 1855 and was buried in United Presbyterian Cemetery, north of Union Grove on Raynor Avenue in Yorkville.

Salmon Child (1765–1856) grew up in Connecticut and New York, and he first served as a "waiter" to his father, who was a captain in a New York regiment. In his mid-teens in 1781 he officially enlisted as a private but primarily served as a "waiter" for a surgeon, also participating in several "alarms" against the British. After the war, he and his wife Olive Rose lived in Saratoga County, New York, where he was a county court judge. In 1848 in his 80s he moved along with his son William to Walworth County in Wisconsin, where he died in 1856 at age 90. He was buried in Honey Creek Cemetery, located just within the Racine County line in the Town of Rochester.

Phineas Caldwell (1757–1857) was born in Massachusetts and served four years in the militia. He later became an innkeeper and an anti-slavery proponent. After receiving a land grant from Wisconsin in recognition for his military service, he moved to Wisconsin at age 93. He was one of the last and oldest surviving veterans of the Revolutionary War, dying just a few weeks before his 100th birthday. He was buried in Union Grove Memorial Cemetery just south of Highway 11, where his epitaph included the following sentiment: "Oh my country, how sure I loved thee… Free all thy sons. May thy freedom be universal and perpetual." These memorials to Revolutionary War veterans continue to connect us to the many people who fought along the East Coast for the establishment of our country's

independence as a nation. It is estimated that over 200,000 Patriot troops participated, losing over 25,000 lives—about a quarter of them as a result of battle injuries, although most died of disease or starvation. We should not forget that the loss of British troops was similar, plus the many civilians who died of smallpox, dysentery, typhoid and other illnesses during those difficult years. The surviving veterans who later brought their families and ideals to the western prairies and frontiers were instrumental in establishing farms, industries, and communities which are still an important part of our lives.

Janet Carter

From the President

Dear Members—
I have updates to a couple items I discussed in recent newsletters. First, fabrication of the Camp Utley sign was completed in December. We have paid Graves Signs for their work. Installation now must wait for spring. At some point, Racine DPW staff will come get the sign pieces from my garage, erect the post on city property, and mount the plaques onto the post. We have thought it would be fitting to have a small ceremony to dedicate the sign. We have some ideas for such a program and a volunteer who is willing to help coordinate it, and soon we will start talking about it in earnest.

Preservation Racine board members who staffed an information table at the Racine Founders Rotary Club Service Above Self Expo, in Sturtevant on January 31, were (standing, from left) Vice President Scott Leonard and Vivian Merlo of the Publications Committee, and (seated, from left) Past President Pippin Michelli and Secretary Deb Schug. Later in the day, Linda Schubert of the Meetings and Programs Committee and her husband, Vic, staffed the table.

Second, the Planning, Heritage and Design Commission (PHDC) approved my request to grant local landmark protection to my house, 1144 Main, on December 1. This was approved by the Common Council on December 16. That is the final approval, and we now have seven such landmarks in Racine. It is the first such designation in 14 years. I hope more will follow, and during this process, several alders and the mayor expressed the same hope. Local landmark status is the type that triggers a public comment and review process when an owner wants to make significant, exterior changes to a historic building (including razing it). This status does not mean an owner cannot move forward with such plans, but it provides public officials and local citizens an opportunity to weigh in on such plans, in the interest of historic preservation.

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The Preservation Racine membership meeting on April 6 will feature an annual election for officers and at-large board members. They are for two-year terms, but with elections staggered so that the entire board is not replaced in a given year. Positions up for election this year are:

- President – currently vacant;
- Vice President – currently occupied by me (Scott Leonard);
- At-Large Board Member #2 – currently occupied by Luann Kohlmann, who will not run again.

While there will be a Nominating Committee, I invite anyone reading this who wants to become more involved in our work to let us know. You can write to us at info@preservationracine.org, where I see all incoming messages. If called upon, I will run for President, but I am eager to have a full set of officers and board members to work with.

A group like ours always needs new minds, new talents, and a wide base of energy to work on our many projects. Without that wide base, our ability to function is threat-

ened. For example, in 2025, sudden illnesses among three of our leaders presented challenges to our projects, including the Tour of Historic Places, our largest fundraiser. We were able to meet that challenge, together. But future years will bring future challenges, and having board vacancies exposes us to a potential breakdown of our work.

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One area where we were a bit thinner in 2025 than in past years was in the number of volunteer docents for the Tour of Historic Places. Typically, there are seven Tour locations, each with several docent locations, each with three shifts during the day. Beth Roeseler, our Treasurer, as in earlier years, worked diligently to staff the Tour and make it a success, but cannot lead the effort again in 2026. Whoever leads it, it is increasingly challenging to staff the docent slots fully.

With that in mind, we were happy to be invited by the Racine Founders Rotary Club to be part of their first Service Above Self Expo, on January 31. There were a few dozen local non-profit groups, each with their own table, and the attendees of the expo were local people looking for ways to volunteer their time. We had good conversations with attendees throughout the day, and have contact information for several new people who may want to volunteer as Tour docents this fall. As in past years, we will staff a similar table at the Starving Artist Fair on August 2.

Scott Leonard, Vice President and acting president

The Missing Story #4, 2509 North Main Street

The series called Missing Stories, are articles on Century Buildings from 2005 that never had their histories told because the 2005 Summer Newsletter was not published. This chapter of Missing Stories is about a cream brick, front-gabled house immediately north of the Racine Zoo at 2509 North Main Street. Before Racine's city limits reached this far north this area was part of the NE ¼ quarter of the fractional section 4-3-23 of Mount Pleasant. In February of 1853, William E. Wording acquired a 167-acre portion of the section for $2,800. He sold a 24-acre portion to Asa Palmer for $300 in April 1855. Palmer sold it to Henry and Catherine Leuker, Prussian immigrants, for $625 in October 1856. Henry farmed his land and also worked as a carpenter.

Henry died on June 21, 1884 at age 52. Catherine continued farming with the children who were still at home. She was 71 when she died on August 19, 1901. The farm was inherited by Theodore, the youngest son of seven children; he continued to farm. On January 8, 1913, he sold the farm for about $21,000 to Dr. Walter Haven, William Hood, Guilbert Tait, and Joseph Pokorny, also known as the William Hood Company. The entire farm was surveyed and platted as the North Park Addition #2, and recorded by the Register of Deeds Office on July 11, 1913.

2509 North Main Street. Racine, a Century Building from 2005

Lot 13, Block 7, the legal description where 2509 North Main Street is situated in that Addition, was sold on December 11, 1917, to Herman and Matilda Dahlke. They sold the lot for $850 to Ernest and Emily Donat in May of 1921. The Dahlkes had continued to live at 1817 Green Street from 1904 to 1950. The address did not appear in the Racine city directory until 1923, so the Donats may have built the house in about 1922. This supposition seemed likely, except the Racine Assessor's Office property information says the house was built in 1902. Maybe it was the location of the farmstead, but plat maps of Mount Pleasant did not have any marks on the Leuker land indicating a house or buildings. But a *Journal Times* article from August 10, 1888, reported a fire on the

Catherine Leuker farm resulting in burned down *barns* and lost hay and chickens. Unfortunately, the fire was only listed as being in Mount Pleasant.

The age of the house seemed clearer after the Mount Pleasant town and Racine city tax rolls at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside Archives showed in 1915, two years after the North Park Addition #2 was created, no houses were on Block 7, and the William Hood Company still owned all the lots. Additionally, Theodore Leuker owned Lots 1-4 on Block 5; a house valued at $2,650 was on Lot 2. The 1920 tax rolls showed Lot 13 was still available for $300; but by the 1922 tax rolls there was an increase in the value of the lot of $2,000. The city directory shows a renter residing in the house in 1923; the Donats were only listed as living in the house in 1925.

The Donats were from Detroit, Michigan, and had returned there by the time they sold the house to Herbert and Ottile Stoffen in July of 1928. The Stoffens were residents of Plymouth, Wisconsin, so the house was occupied by renters from 1927 through 1944. In March of 1944, widow Johanna Rosa, a mother of nine, purchased the house and lived there until she died in December 1955. Johanna's eldest daughter Florence Stupar was the executive of the estate and sold the house to Leo Henry and Sophie Lotharius in October 1956. They lived in the house for nearly thirty-two years before selling to Charles and Mary Manning in summer of 1980. They remained in the house for eight years. In December 1988 the Mannings sold the house to Christiane Minakian, a nurse at St. Luke's campus of Ascension All Saints, who is the current owner and longest resident by far at thirty-seven years and counting. She loves her house and its unique location. Where else in Racine could one see elephants and giraffes through the back windows, and hear the squawk of peacocks through the years?

But the twenty-year discrepancy of the age of the house is mystifying. Could it be a typo? Was the Leuker homestead or another house moved to the lot in 1922? Another interesting fact is the last brickyard producing cream brick in Racine, Hilker Brothers, closed in 1914, so 1922 would have been rather late to build a cream brick building. Luckily, the homeowner helped solve the mystery. Christiane has a postcard with an original photo of her house resting on timbers in the process of being moved. The back side is addressed to Ernest Donat at 1729 Geneva Street; it indicates he paid $3,500 in 1923 for the house and probably the moving costs. The house has undergone numerous changes, such as removing the original back porch and putting on an addition for a kitchen and upstairs bedroom, two separate windows replaced the centered double window in the front gable, plus a full front porch was added.

Then and Now: (above) 2709 North Main Street in process of relocation (postcard Miniakin), and (below) today (Google Maps)

One final mystery remains—where was the house originally built? The only clue has been passed down through the years is that it was a "Haumerson honeymoon house." If anyone can help fill the gap Christiane would love it!

Debbie Yale

Racine's Root River Parks added to Nati

In our two previous articles on the Root River Parks (which appeared in the 2025 Fall and Winter Newsletters), we traced the professional and personal collaborations that produced the very idea of a park-and-boulevard system extending from today's Quarry Lake, along the Root River, and up to North Beach, and the initial difficulties in securing the Island and Riverside Parks. Here, we will look at the Erskine Park purchase, which also faced determined opposition.

During this time, problems were also emerging for the J. I. Case Company, and resolving these, too, faced implacable opposition. The two "wars" may have been connected – or not – but, just as there were those determined to prevent Racine's proposed park system, there were those who were determined to prevent the Case Company from expanding commercially and thus increasing its taxable value to the city.

The J. I. Case Company Problem

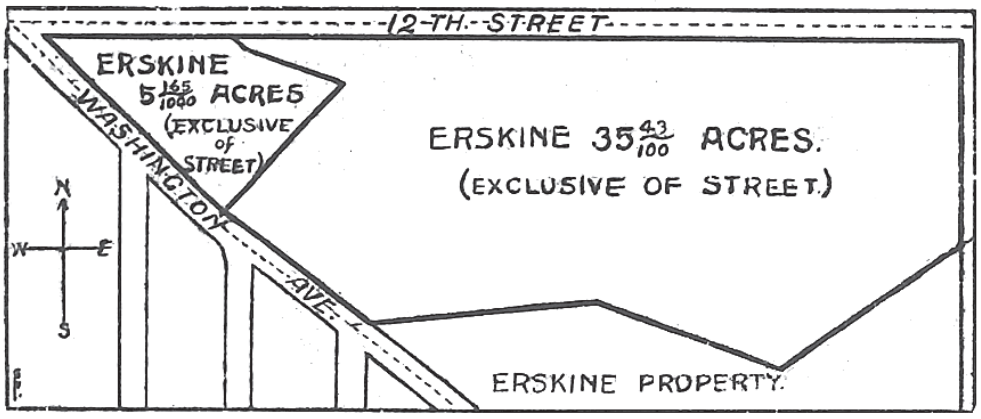
In the mid 1890s, the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company had become the biggest taxpayer in the city. It was owned and run by a closely intermarried alliance of families: the Case, Erskine, Baker, Bull, and Robinson families. In 1891 Jerome Case had died, disposing of all his interests in the company, and his former partner and brother-in-law Stephen Bull (the elder) became chief director, while his son Frank K. Bull became president. Soon there were rumors of disagreements about modernization, and some felt the company was in danger of losing its competitive edge. The party of modernization – the Bull and Robinson families – bought out the company in 1897. The Case, Erskine, and Baker parties resigned. The new directors and officers immediately founded new outposts in Europe, South America, and Australia, but in Racine things were more difficult. The company campus was constrained by its location within the loop of the Root River and State Street, so there was too little space to grow or install more modern equipment and processes. The most immediate way to resolve this would have been to take over the three streets that ran through the campus, and the City was approached in 1898 with the provisos that the Case company would of course compensate the City appropriately. These streets were little used but the company planned to keep Bridge Street open for pedestrians, light it, pave it (the new machines were sinking axle-deep in the existing mud streets), and set up fire hydrants. The expansion of the business would have been worth $150,000 – but it could not be done because the City refused to vacate the streets for any consideration. The Case directors tried all they could to persuade the City, threatened to relocate to St. Paul, Minnesota, brought new workers from that city to Racine, and even, in 1903, offered to buy Erskine Park outright and donate it to the City. All to no avail. It is not at all clear why the City was so adamantly against this expansion but we do know that the Racine Socialistic and Labor Party petitioned against it, declaring that the business titans in Racine received more from the City than they paid for.

Erskine Park

Why did the Case Company offer to purchase Erskine Park for the City? Because in February 1901 Charles E. Erskine (proud Presbyterian descendent of the Pilgrim Fathers) had

MR. ERSKINE'S OFFER TO CITY OF RACINE.

Opportunity Presented of Purchasing Site of Thirty-Five Acres Near Mound Cemetery to be Used as Public Park Should Be Taken Advantage of by the City.



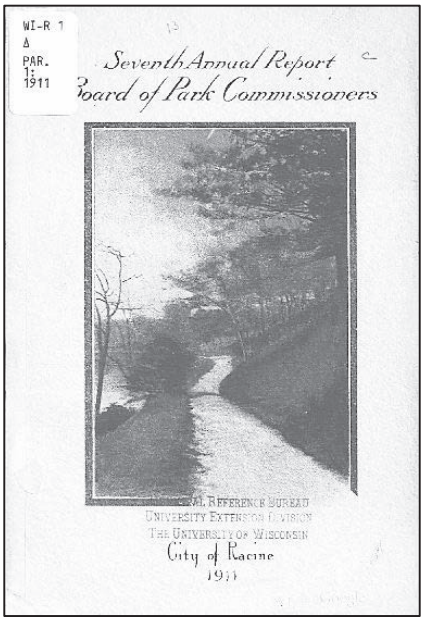
The diagram herewith presented, gives an idea of the shape of the two proposed sites offered.

Racine Daily Journal, 9 February 1901, p1

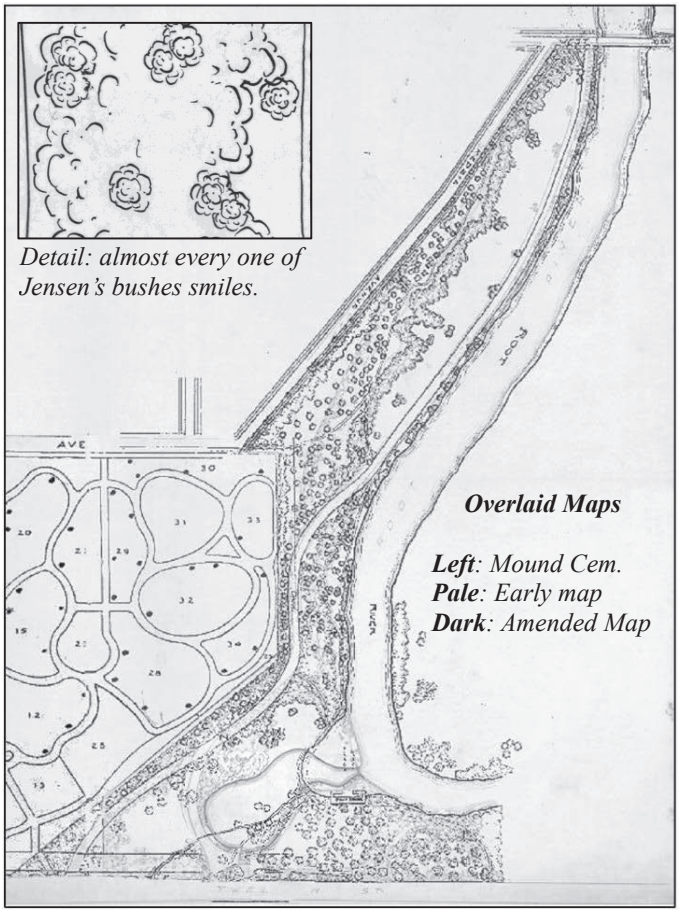
offered to sell it to the City to be used in perpetuity for park purposes. He would sell for something under $20,000 on condition there be no liquor sold on the grounds, and no games or amusements on Sundays. And he wanted a fence between the park and his residence on Washington Avenue (opposite Taylor Avenue, now replaced by the Parkview Apartments). Mayor Michael Higgins quickly announced that the City would buy the Erskine lands. This set off several years of stop-go, with several proposals for subscriptions from Racine's wealthy elite, dedicated taxes, and city budget items – and the Woman's Club even diverted their fundraising efforts from Lake Park (now Pershing Park) to the Erskine property – and by 1905 the land had still not been acquired, although the City was indeed leasing it for park purposes with an option to buy.

Parks or Streets?

In December 1904, Mayor Peter Nelson proposed a Park Commission, opposed by Alderman William H. Bell on the inaccurate and misleading grounds that the City did not currently have a park and "there were no immediate prospects of getting one". By 1905 there was increasing real estate interest in Erskine Park, and another City attempt to purchase it was foiled. The problem seems to have focused around Alderman Bell. He represented the 6th (later 11th) Ward, which happened to include all of the Erskine parkland and Mound Cemetery, and the streets around them. Bell was also State Assemblyman for the First District of Wisconsin, and County Administrator because he was such a realistic, shrewd, and honest realtor. In the Common Council he served on the Printing Committee (one of his brothers was a printer), and more importantly on the Streets, and on the Cemetery Committees. He was a conscientious and productive alderman who had somehow fallen out with Alderman Nicholas Fratt and Mayor Nelson. Thus, when Alderman Fratt again proposed another referendum to buy the Erskine tract, Bell (alone) opposed it and was roundly denigrated by Mayor Nelson as having always opposed city parks, and the council should ignore him. Bell retorted that this was "only when it was proposed to take $8,000-worth of land from the Mound Cemetery for the proposed parks."



Otherwise, he was in favor of them. But, despite daily assurances by the Park Commission and the *Racine Daily Journal* that streets and parks would be given equal treatment, the referendum failed again because the citizens had somehow become convinced that the money would be spent either on the park system alone or on the streets alone, and they preferred the streets which were getting their first, much-needed permanent paving. The Park Department and the pledged donors were so discouraged by this that pledges were withdrawn and the department nearly folded. At this point, the Case Company made a last ditch attempt to persuade the City to vacate at least one of the streets it needed, by offering (again) to buy Erskine Park outright for the City if the City would only release Bridge Street. No deal.



Detail: almost every one of Jensen's bushes smiles.

Interestingly, Alderman Bell, in his capacity as State Assemblyman (and whose first job in Racine had been with the J. I. Case Company) proposed a bill one year later (1905) to allow businesses to build bridges or tunnels across streets, thus leaving them open if the City would not vacate them.

Alderman Bell's conviction that the City proposed to take $8,000-worth of land from Mound Cemetery was not without foundation. As we saw in Part 2 of this series (Winter 2025), the Businessmen's Association's Parks

(continued on page 9)

Made In Racine – Automobiles (Part One)

When you think of American automobile manufacturers, Detroit is probably the first city that comes to mind, right? Well, there was a time when Racine was considered a formidable automobile manufacturing city as well! In fact, one of the world's first automobiles was made right here back in 1873, when Rev. John W. Carhart built a crude steam-powered vehicle that he drove on the streets of Racine.

Around the turn of the last century, automobile manufacturing mushroomed in cities throughout the country as the "horseless carriage" age began, and Racine was no exception. Before long, automobiles with the "Made in Racine" designation began to appear on the market. Some of the names may not sound familiar today, but they all left their mark on Racine's rich industrial history.

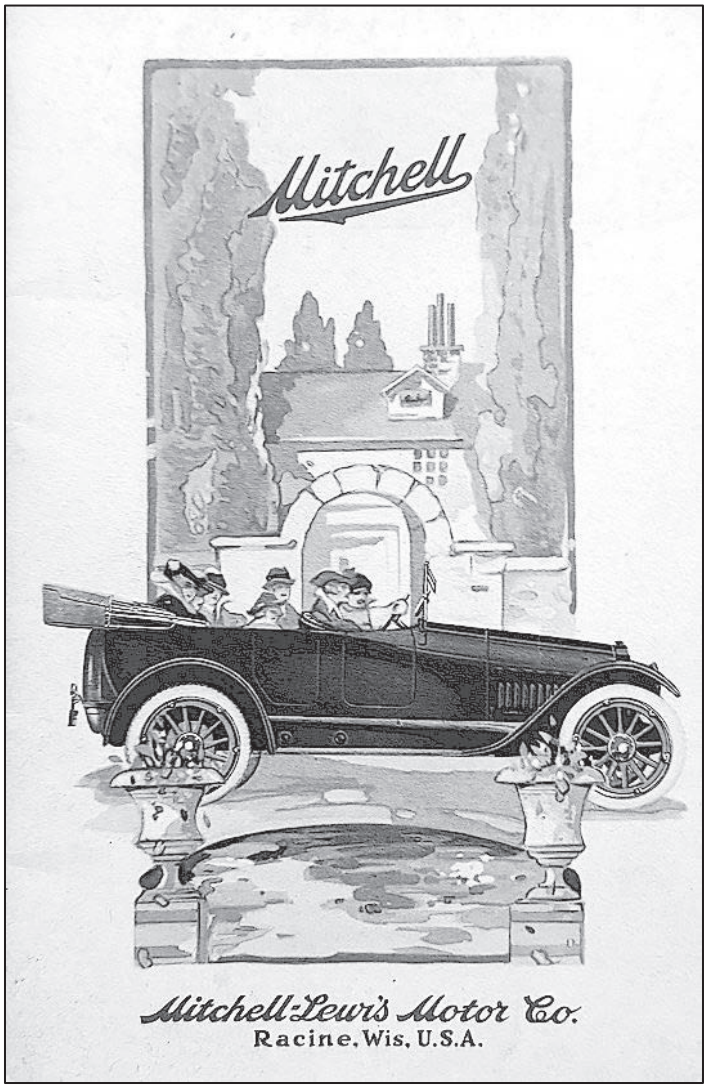
Perhaps our largest and best-known automobile manufacturer was the Mitchell Motors Company. Its parent company, the Mitchell & Lewis Wagon Company, had been manufacturing wagons here in Racine since the 1850s. In the 1890s, a Mitchell subsidiary in Racine, the Wisconsin Wheel Works, was building bicycles and, by 1900, also motorcycles. In 1903, another subsidiary, the Mitchell Motor Car Company, began building automobiles, and the motorcycle business was later sold off. The first Mitchell automobiles had only two seats, were chain-driven, and used tiller steering (no steering wheel; just a lever attached to the front wheels). One model had a 4-horsepower, 4-stroke engine, while their runabout boasted a 7-horsepower, 2-stroke engine. With all that "horsepower," you certainly could not have the "need for speed"!

In 1910, the wagon and automobile businesses were merged into the Mitchell-Lewis Motor Company, which continued producing Mitchell cars. They proved to be very reliable. The company's use of assembly-line techniques, innovative mechanical improvements, and extensive sales promotions helped grow the company into a leader in the automotive industry. By 1914, Mitchell's two Racine plants covered over 30 acres and employment reached several hundred people. The firm was reorganized in 1916 as the Mitchell Motors Company.

Their slogan, "The car you ought to have at the price you ought to pay," was used for several years and proved to be a clever marketing tool—It is somewhat catchy, isn't it?

In 1915, Cadillac came out with a V-8 engine, and Mitchell soon followed suit. Unfortunately, problems with the cooling and lubrication systems emerged (resulting in burned-out engine parts), forcing Mitchell to drop the V-8 option by 1917. However, the company's reputation was damaged and sales dropped dramatically.

Then in 1920, the unthinkable happened. In a last-ditch effort to get the company back on track, Mitchell came out with a completely redesigned car. It now featured a rear-sloped or "slanted" radiator, now tilted back at a very noticeable angle, which potential customers thought looked a little awkward. Of course, this caused sales to plummet, even though Mitchell advertising brochures claimed that their new design was the "future styling trend." Critics, however, labeled the model as the "Drunken Mitchell." That nickname stuck, causing sales to fall through the floorboard. The company corrected its "mistake" in time for their 1922 models but, by then, it was too late. Sales continued to slump, until the company was forced into bankruptcy in 1923.



Mitchell-Lewis Motor Company poster (1910 or later). Jim Mercier Collection.

Post for a promotional song written in 1909, featuring a girl who preferred a fast spin down the boulevard in her young man's Mitchell with the hood open and her hair flying. Jim Mercier Collection.

Listen to the song here: https://mitchellcarcollection.com/history/mitchell-jingle/

Nash Motors of Kenosha bought the defunct Mitchell plants for $405,000 in 1924 and produced their Ajax and Lafayette models there until 1938, the last year cars would be made in Racine. One Mitchell building survives today, the Mitchell Wagon Lofts at 815 8th Street. It was built in 1910 by Guilbert and Funston, and was used for Nash operations until 1929.

Next time, we'll dig into a few more Racine automobile manufacturers … some you may never have heard of! Stay tuned.

Jim Mercier

Root River Parks *(continued from page 7)*

Association had proposed requesting the southeast corner of Mound Cemetery to adjoin the Riverside Park in January 1902. Since this consisted of steep bluffs and marshy lowland useless for burials, and the cemetery had received an extension to the north in 1899, this should not have posed any difficulty. But the issue had not been resolved by 1906, when Jens Jensen's first proposal for Riverside Park, made in June that year, was labeled "Cemetery Park", although it did not include cemetery lands. Perhaps this caused unreported friction, as another possibly later plan of the same year shows the entire area, including the cemetery lands, now labeled "Riverside Park." This narrow park not only connected the Island and Erskine Parks but the apparently earlier map (palest in overlay) shows it also contained a sizeable "lagoon" (that was used for fishing competitions), while the apparently amended map (darkest in overlay) shows it reduced and widened to become a "canoe harbor." In passing, one delightful detail of Jensen's work at this period is the way he adds smiley faces to most of his planned shrubs.

At Last, the Erskine Park Purchase

Meanwhile, the City continued to lease Erskine Park until 1907, when the option to buy it was due to expire. Fund-raising subscriptions and referendums had failed, as we have seen, but then, just as the purchase option was about to expire "Trustee" David G. Janes loaned the City about $25,000 to cover the cost. This was done forthwith but led instantly to lawsuits, as Erskine's executors refused to sign over the park, claiming that the taxes had not been paid in two years, and the lease itself had gone unpaid in the current year. These costs were reimbursed and finally the Park belonged to the City.

There are still gaps in the information. It would be great to identify the anonymous would-be park donor (or donors) and the sites offered. For example, when there were issues about buying Erskine Park, a donor offered another area of parkland that was, according to the *Racine Daily Journal* of December 29, 1904, "just as good." A few months later, the *Racine Daily Journal* of April 8, 1905, reported that a donor who was proposing to give yet another park, backed out (along with almost the entire slate of financial donors) when the Erskine purchase referendum failed. Then, after the parks were secured and the Park Board was seeking a mill tax for park maintenance, the *Racine Daily Journal* of September 21, 1909, noted a potential donor who wanted assurance that any land he donated would be properly maintained – a big ask at the time, since funding was proving difficult to pin down. The tax failed and the proposed donation is never mentioned again.

The City Parks Commission, and the Businessmen's Association's Parks Association, worked indefatigably. It was an uphill battle, and much of the funding came from their own pockets and businesses, but gradually they won out. Although the City continued to squeeze the parks on funding, they *were* acquired, Jens Jensen *did* produce designs for them and teams of maintenance workers *were* deployed. But the story doesn't quite end here. Another installment is needed to cover the completion of the Root River park system with the acquisition of the land within Cedar Bend, and its conversion, along with the Erskine Park, to a public golf course.

Pippin Michelli

Preservation Racine
Membership Meeting
Monday, March 2, 2026
7:00 PM
First Presbyterian Church
716 College Avenue
(College and 7th Street)
Racine, Wisconsin

WisconSing Program Starring David Drake

From the Domes of Milwaukee (and all-over southeast Wisconsin) to the shores of Racine, musician/folk singer David Drake, will capture the history of Wisconsin through song. Gathering around the campfire (i.e., Ihrman Hall at First Presbyterian Church), we will participate in music that is relevant to our past.

David, known as the gentle troubadour, brings a new way for us to learn history with several instruments as well as his trusty guitar. Expect a possible collection such as banjo, concertina, dulcimer, and Native American flute.

He has earned numerous awards including "Folk Artist of the Year" and "Family Artist of the Year" presented by the Wisconsin Academy of the Music Industry (WAMI). So, bring your toe-tapping shoes and your best voice to enjoy an evening of history the musical way.

Coffee and light refreshments will be served. Parking is on site and overflow at a lot across Park Avenue to the west of the church lot.

Linda Schubert, Program Chair linda.schubert@att.net 262.632.7537

Upcoming Events in 2026

❖ April 6	Hoping to secure Jim Draeger who will speak on old gas stations that came with an attendant who checked your oil level. We're still working on this one so look for the announcement. Jim Mercier will have old gas station signs on display.
❖ May 4	Century Buildings
❖ June 1	Speaker unconfirmed
❖ Aug 31	Carol and Jim Mercier "Scooping the Loop"
❖ September 27	Tour of Historic Places
❖ November 2	Speaker unconfirmed
❖ December 7	Speaker unconfirmed

Be sure to visit Preservation Racine's updated web site at www.preservationracine.org. We are a nonprofit community group active in historic preservation. P. O. Box 383, Racine, WI 53401.

For address or other changes to your membership, please contact Marcia Pfost at mpfost@wi.rr.com

Looking for Century Buildings

Preservation Racine needs your help to find potential Century Building Award recipients for our upcoming May 4 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, over 460 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. You can email info@preservationracine.org and 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

PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

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NEWSLETTER

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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 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 mpfost@wi.rr.com (262-632-0937)
Membership Chair (Annual membership renewal is March 1)

Preservation Racine, Inc.
P.O. Box 383
Racine, WI 53401

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PRESERVATION RACINE MEMBERSHIP

☐ Lifetime Membership $500
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☐ Corporate $250 ☐ Sponsoring $75 ☐ Contributing $40

☐ Family $35 ☐ Individual $25

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Please mail check to: Preservation Racine, Inc., PO Box 383, Racine, WI 53401
www.preservationracine.org