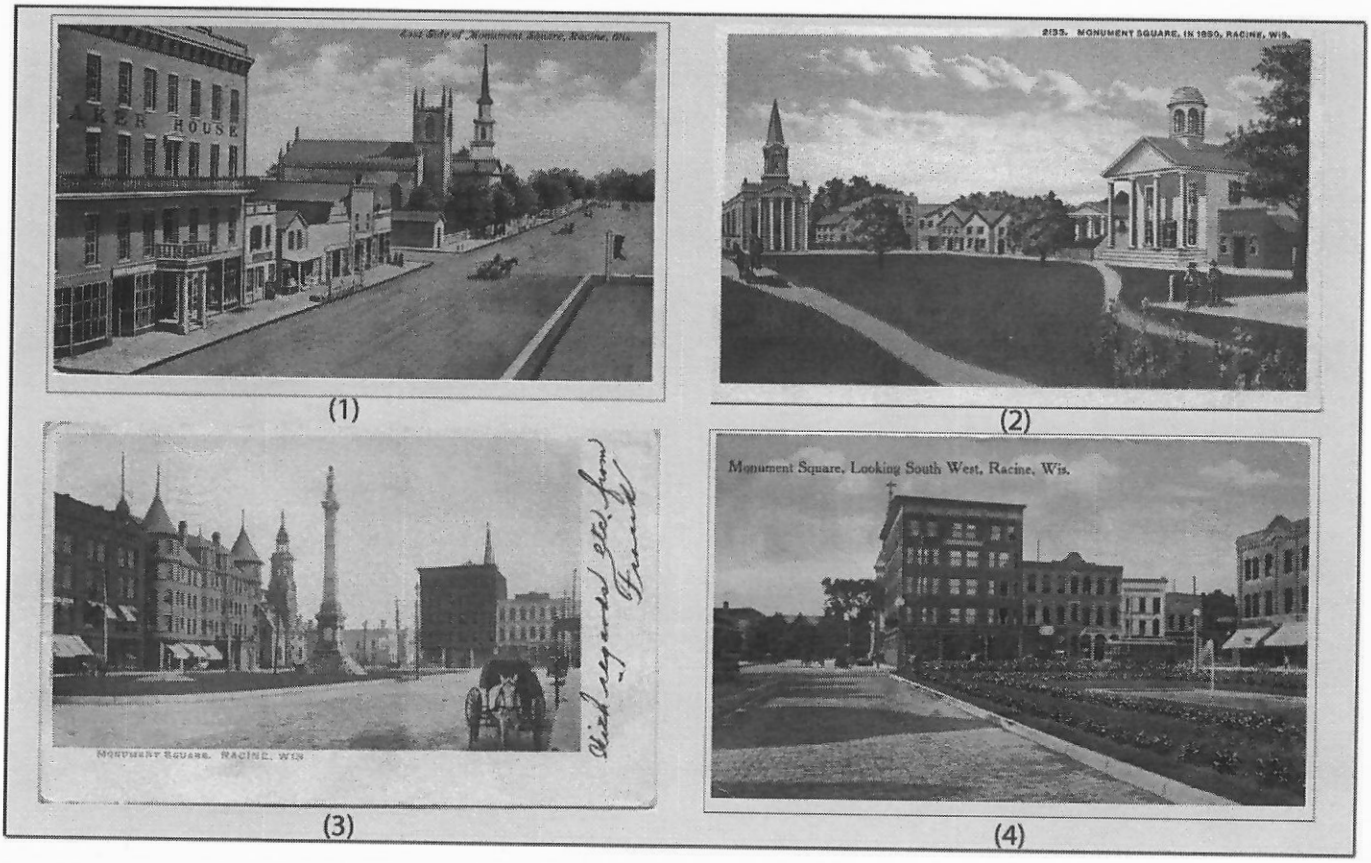
PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2013

MONUMENT SQUARE ITERATIONS

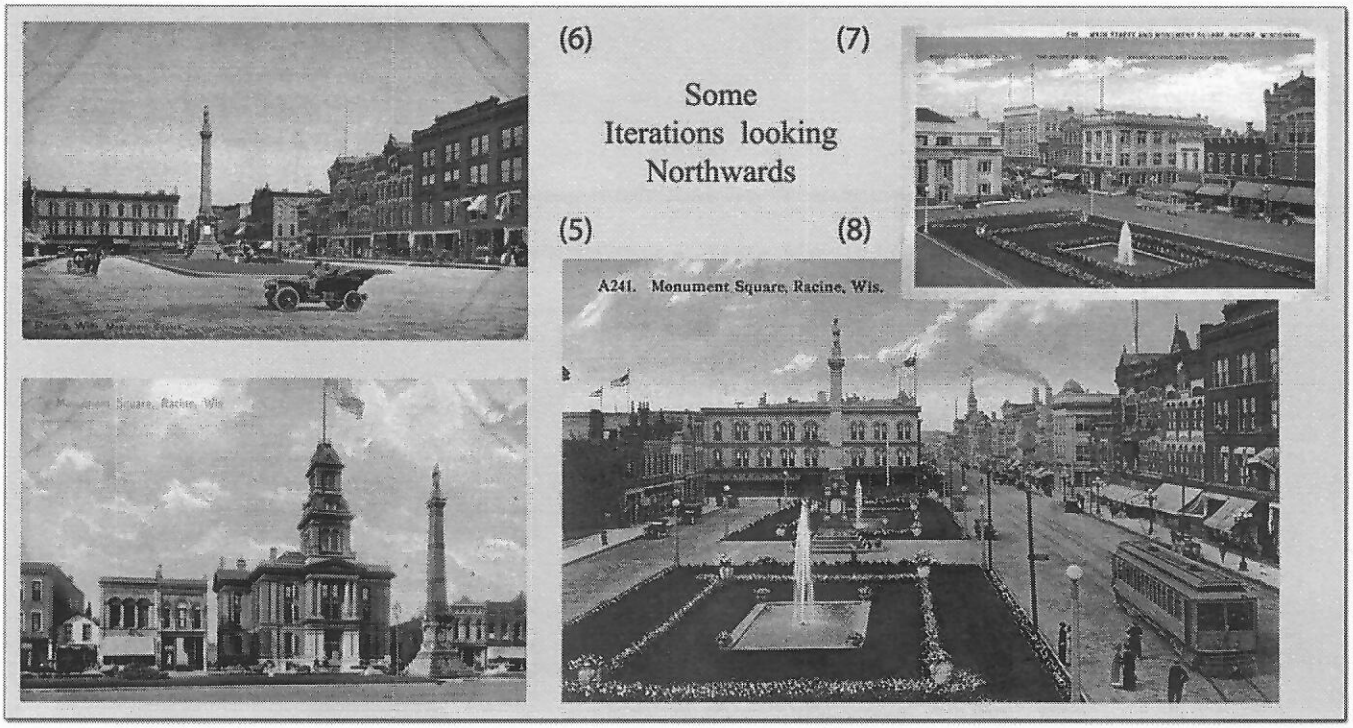


These postal card images show many different views of the public square in Racine. As best as could be determined they are arranged in historical order.

Have you ever wondered why our square is a rectangle? It is curious because the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 presented the plan for new communities in the territories to be a system of grids and squares. Folk history says that Gilbert Knapp had some convincing rationale for designating this area a rectangle and so it has remained.

What we call Monument Square began as the public hay market square. During Racine's infancy public and business affairs were initially conducted along the Root River and Main Street junction. However, within a very few years as the tiny community and surrounding farms grew those activities were centered in the public square five blocks south of the river. Farmers came to town to sell their produce and wheat and the public square was called Hay Market Square.

Without specific dates for the postal card images the presence of the Civil War Soldiers Monument, that was dedicated on July 4, 1884, offers a time marker. Since then the square has been known as Monument Square. Other dating clues are clothing styles and the absence of and later appearance of automobiles. Buildings also add to the time line. Another factor is street surfacing. Racine did not begin paving streets until 1884. An interesting bit of Racine history is that before and during that time street maintenance was under the direction of each alderman. Every ward was responsible for raising its own funds for repair and maintenance of its streets.



In the better-defined pictures street surfaces can be perceived. Faced limestone blocks were the first to replace the dirt road or crushed stone surfaces. Granite sets were another paving material. Research indicates that Main Street from the river to Fifth Street was the first area to be so paved. It appears that paving happened here and there and whenever. By the beginning of the twentieth century the following had been paved: Sixth Street to Park Avenue; State Street from Main Street to the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Station; Washington Avenue from Sixth Street to Fourteenth Street; and Douglas Avenue, Junction Avenue, and south Main Street from Monument Square to Fourteenth Street. Shortly before 1900 red pavers (bricks) were introduced and can be seen today on College Avenue from Fourteenth Street to DeKoven Avenue and on Yout Street.

As to buildings that define time, there are four constants. On the northwest corner of the square and Fifth Street is the Manufacturers National Bank building. In the earlier post card images it was an Italianate style edifice (6 & 8, above). Later the building's style is Greek revival (7). With bank failures happening frequently, bank architecture turned to the stolid Greek building designs to portray a stable institution. That can be seen also in the later expanded First National Bank south of the County Court House on the west side of the square (11). Opposite the Manufacturers Bank at Fifth and Main Streets was the Italianate Gorton Block that later housed the Commercial and Savings Bank and was recast in the Classical Revival style (6, 7, 8). Facing the south side of the square was the original Italianate Robinson Building that in later images had been remodeled to what we see there today (3 & 4).

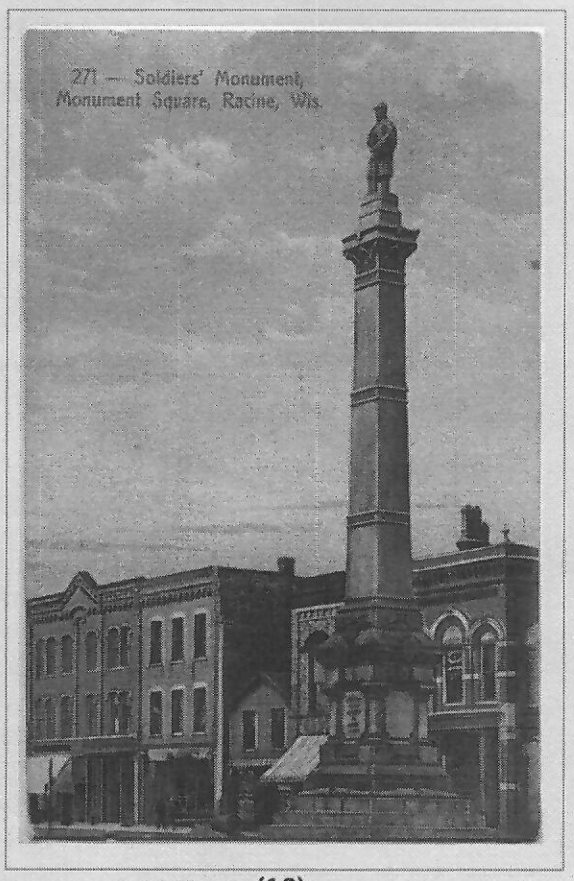
The square has experienced many landscaping and design changes. A careful look at the progression of the post card images shows that the landscaped sections of the square were shorter north-to-south in the earlier depictions. Although the renowned landscape architect, Jens Jensen, designed a plan for Monument Square it was not implemented by the city. However, the later post cards show landscaping that very closely resembles his plan. The current design has moved from a garden type setting to that of a place for people to gather and the square serves as an open-air entertainment center.

Uses of space surrounding the square changed with time, also. From the early days of hay market type business there followed a progression of stores, office buildings, and banks similar to what we have today. The square conjures up both historical memories and hopes for a viable future for the city of Racine.

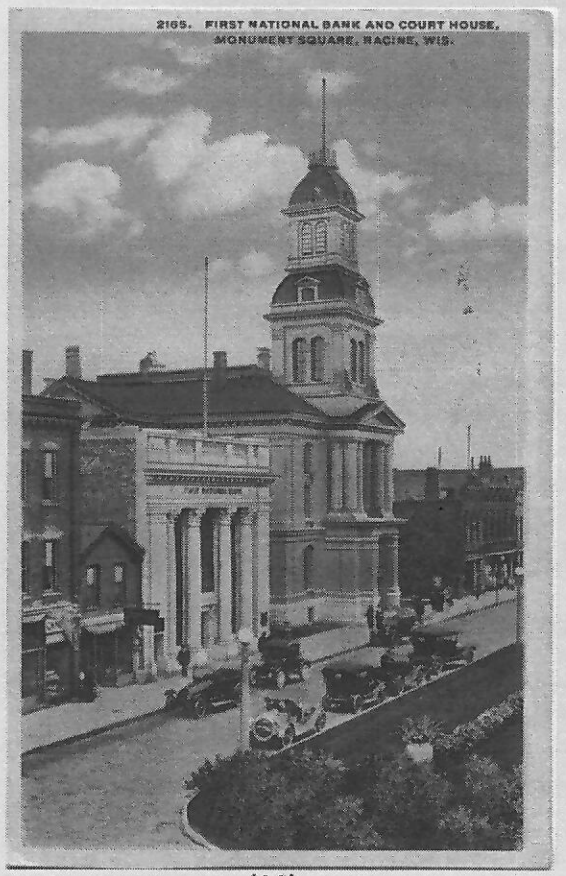
Barbara Walter

294. MONUMENT SQUARE AND 6TH ST., SHOWING HOTEL RACINE AND POST OFFICE, RACINE, WISCONSIN.

(9)


271 — Soldiers' Monument,
Monument Square, Racine, Wis.

(10)


2165. FIRST NATIONAL BANK AND COURT HOUSE,
MONUMENT SQUARE, RACINE, WIS.

(11)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As my term as President approaches a conclusion, I want to share with you some thoughts I have about several issues associated with Preservation Racine. I am encouraged by the direction the organization is taking in several areas. As it is with many organizations, however, more work needs to be done to achieve sustainability and growth. Shortly after I assumed the role of president two years ago, I wrote in the newsletter about the dissolving of Rotary West in Racine, and how its demise could theoretically occur to any non-profit group. As I prepared to write this message, it was announced that the Racine Woman's Club had formally ended its nearly 120-year existence due to dwindling membership. Both of these groups had a strong involvement in the community for many years, and our city will not benefit from their absence. I want to stress once again that what happened to these two groups can also happen to Preservation Racine. We cannot afford to sit back and feel secure, applauding only our *past* or *current* accomplishments. We must take specific steps to secure our *future* as a premier historic preservation organization in the state of Wisconsin. With that in mind, here are a few of my thoughts as we go forward.

Fund Raising Committee

There are two primary areas that Preservation Racine must continue to pursue and expand: membership and corporate donations. This organization will only be as strong as its membership and treasury permits. The organization has been facing $6,000-$7,000 operational budget deficits for the past two years. With that in mind, I established a Finance Committee to closely monitor this year's budget to determine what measures can be employed to avoid utilizing financial reserves to pay for projected annual deficits or capital projects.

Membership

To assist the Finance Committee, the Board has placed a strong emphasis on strategies to increase membership revenues by obtaining more life memberships, encouraging current members to renew, and recruiting new people to join. It is important that all members *renew* their membership annually to support the group's financial obligations and programs. Equally important is the *expansion* of the membership base, which generates added income and enhances the group's presence in the community. Strength lies in numbers, and Preservation Racine will continue to be a strong advocate for preservation efforts in Racine County as long as it is sustained by its followers.

Corporate Donations

One recommendation of the Finance Committee this year is to solicit more corporate donations and to make Preservation Racine more visible in the community. While supporters of preservation applaud the programs and activities of this organization – which is evident by the number of people who take the annual Tour of Historic Places – Preservation Racine needs to pro-actively market itself to individuals, area corporations, and other potential donors to place itself in a position to obtain additional funding. The Board needs to have an individual oversee this special fund raising initiative. Corporate fund raising is worthy of a special committee to search out and secure available monies in the community.

Funding Capital Projects

As it moves forward, Preservation Racine needs to identify external funding sources for future capital projects, rather than relying on existing assets to pay for those projects. This type of funding comes primarily from corporate donations and from available grant monies. Available grants need to be identified and grants need to be written. Grants and corporate donations should pay for the majority of all capital projects, while monies generated from the annual Tour and memberships should pay the group's operating expenses.

By-Laws

I am pleased to report that the Board has revised its By-Laws to ensure that the organization's written policies and the implementation of its processes are consistent with each other. Such a revision takes a substantial amount of review and discussion, and I would like to extend a special word of thanks to board member Don Schumacher for coordinating this project. The revisions were presented to the membership at the February and March membership meeting and need to be voted upon by the general membership when a new slate of officers and board members are elected in April.

Research and Reproduction Fees

Another topic that the Board has been discussing is whether to assess fees for research, photographs, copies of material, and photographic reproduction for publication purposes. As the organization's archives at the Blake House continue to increase in size, our Historian Sharon Baldukas continues to receive more requests for information about specific buildings, residences, and neighborhoods. This research can often take several hours per request. With only a part-time volunteer staff, the amount of time involved processing requests for information can be substantial. Although the organization has traditionally donated this research time to assist answering queries and questions, the Board is now looking at the possibility of charging nominal fees to offset time and materials.

Board and Committee Development

Preservation Racine needs to maintain a strong Board of Directors to propel the organization forward in all of its operations, activities, programs, and events. As we prepare to elect a new slate of officers and board members, I encourage everyone to consider board service, or to serve on a committee. Preservation Racine has a rich tradition of identifying and commemorating centennial buildings, hosting a wonderful annual tour of historic places, producing a newsletter stuffed with local history, offering fascinating monthly programs to its members, and advocating preservation in the greater Racine area. We need good researchers, writers, promoters, event planners, creative thinkers, and committee chairs. There is a place for *YOU* in the one of these areas! Get involved. Have some fun. Make a difference in Racine.

Preservation Awareness

Recently a commercial building was razed on Washington Avenue in Uptown. This has been a concern for many members of Preservation Racine, since we are in the job of promoting the preservation of buildings, rather than their destruction. One of our members, Jan Carter, e-mailed a city council member, encouraging the City to pursue alternative options to the standard "repair or raze orders." Here are a few excerpts of ideas Jan proposed to the City:

"I am concerned about the likely upcoming loss of more of Racine's historic buildings. I was also shocked to read that when that Uptown building was recently razed within about a month of when it was first announced in the paper as a possibility, the demo company didn't even know if there were shared walls or not (there weren't), and they also found during demolition that some of the beams of the building were inserted into the adjoining buildings, so that had to be taken care of. While an open space or plaza at that particular location might be an acceptable alternative, the city plans to issue many more "repair or raze" orders (too often called "raze or repair" as if razing is the preferred action). The city will then move quickly to raze buildings and charge the costs to the building owners' taxes, in order to have a large pool of potential fines and payments to carry out the destruction. (But if owners haven't paid their taxes in several years, are they likely to pay for the demolition?) Instead of aggressively issuing repair or raze orders for run-down properties, it's better to use the carrot rather than the stick…and there is an interesting article about Waterford's Curb Appeal program in the paper today -- on the business page, I think. Why couldn't Racine follow a similar plan? If people knew about the delinquent properties and the availability of funding, maybe someone local would come forth and buy such vacant buildings for a low cost plus back taxes, and then really do something useful with them.

Waterford is granting up to $5K in matching funds for Heritage District downtown facade improvements, which must follow the village's new Heritage District design guidelines. Waterford has $60K total available, to cover at least 12 commercial buildings. The village is working with Racine County Economic Development Corp. and a nonprofit group, Absolutely Waterford http://www.absolutelywaterford.org/. They also provide free facade design assistance through the Wisconsin Main Street Program http://inwisconsin.com/mainstreet/ as well as information on preservation & renovation (?? hopefully they mean restoration!) resources….
It is too bad that the city thought that the facade was so bad that the building was going to fall down, and that the owners did not try selling the building forthe amount of the back taxes. Hopefully the city

mentioned the grant possibility to the property owners (although they would have had to pay up the taxes in order to qualify). Better yet, the owners could have been informed about the grant when they bought the building (in poor condition and in a depressed area), and then maybe they could have fixed it up a little and at least made it profitable before they fell behind in the taxes. But I am glad to hear that the city is willing to work with property owners, and the grant availability is a great program and looks pretty user-friendly, not threatening."

Final Words

As I prepare to leave the presidency and the Board, I wish to thank the board members who I have had the privilege to work with. Thanks to all who continue to give their time and talent to Preservation Racine! I look forward to working with all of you in the days ahead.

Steven K. Rogstad

A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FOR PRESERVATION RACINE

Preservation Racine will celebrate its 40th Anniversary this year. This organization began as a non-profit citizen group whose purpose was to identify and promote preservation of worthy buildings, districts, and sites in the Racine area which have historic, architectural, or cultural value. Preservation Racine grew to meet a community need that was identified at a Junior League of Racine meeting as a project and was initially funded by that organization. Our country's bicentennial celebration in 1976 aroused interest in preservation throughout the country. Racine was no different.

In the early years, Preservation Racine:

- raised funds for an architectural survey of 140 square blocks of Racine by Johnson, Johnson and Roy.
- operated bus tours of historic and architecturally significant buildings located on the north and south sides of Racine.
- presented a four-part architectural history course in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Extension.
- provided an on-going research program of local buildings.
- aided in establishing an ordinance for the City of Racine Landmarks Preservation Commission.
- active in researching and filing of individual and district nominations to the State Preservation Office for the National Register of Historic Places.

In June 1977, Preservation Racine, the Racine County Historical Society, and the Junior League of Racine saved the Blake house from being razed by signing a two-year lease and began the restoration of this historic building with the help of many community volunteers. In 2005 Preservation Racine purchased the Blake House, which became our office and home to our archive. This building also has three rental units.

Recently, Preservation Racine installed eight bronze markers, seven of them mounted on Bedford limestone locks at the DeKoven Center to explain the history of these significant and irreplaceable buildings. This year will be our 38th Annual Tour of Historic Places featuring seven buildings that have contributed to the story of Racine. We publish a newsletter four times per year featuring articles of historic or architectural interest. Preservation Racine's digital collection of Newsletters has now been "harvested" and is available through the Wisconsin Heritage online portal. This means portal users can view our Newsletters alongside thousands of other digital history materials from libraries, archives, museums and historical societies across the state. This link can be found on our web page at www.preservationracine.org. During National Preservation Month, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in May, Preservation Racine will host an event to honor twelve Racine County buildings that are at least 100 years old and have been carefully preserved and/or restored.

March of every year is our membership renewal month. Individual memberships begin at $10 for an individual, $15 for a family, or $150 for a lifetime membership. Just as membership dues are crucial to our monetary well-being, so too are your ideas, expertise, and input. Please consider renewing your membership in this valuable organization. Please look at the mailing label on this Newsletter: if you are not a life member or if it does not show the date 2013, it is time to renew!

Happy birthday Preservation Racine. May the next year breathe new life into Racine's historic assets.

CENTURY BULDING AWARDS

Preservation Racine will celebrate National Preservation month this May. This community event recognizes and awards building owners that have maintained, preserved, renovated, or restored Racine County buildings that are at least one hundred years old.

Members of this year's committee are Jan Carter, Robin Coventry, Nat Cycenas, Karri Hemmig, Janet Kuhl, Jacki Mekemson, Vivian Merlo, Pippin Michelli, Pat Murphy, Marcia Pfost, and Barbara Walter.

The celebration will take place on Monday, May 6, in the Great Hall at the DeKoven Center. The reception will begin at 6:30 p.m.honoring the building owners, followed by the presentation of the buildings and awards at 7:00 p.m.

Preservation Racine members are the hosts for this event and are asked to bring an appetizer or dessert for the reception. Beverages will be provided.

IF THIS HOUSE COULD TALK...

The Newsletter Committee would like to initiate a new occasional column where people can tell about the interesting or funny discoveries and experiences that happened while renovating or restoring their houses or buildings.

What stories do you have to share? We would be glad to hear from you and will be happy to help with any aspect, e.g. writing or development, if needed.

Please contact the Newsletter Chair, Viviang@AOL.com or (262) 634-0734.

COMING UP

March Membership Meeting
Monday, March 4, 2013, 7:00 p.m.
Greater Mount Eagle Missionary Baptist Church
929 State Street

April Member ship Meeting
Monday, April 1, 2013, 7:00 p.m.
Guest Speaker Kaleb Case
Location TBA

National Preservation Month
May 2013
Discover America's Hidden Gems

Century Building Certificate Awards
Monday, May 6, 2013, 6:30 p.m.
Great Hall at The DeKoven Center

Wright Plus 2013
Saturday May 18, 2013
A Housewalk in Oak Park, Illinois

Wright and Like
Saturday, June 8, 2013
Lake Delavan and Lake Geneva

Preservation Racine Tour of Historic Places
Sunday, September 29, 2013, noon to 5:30 p.m.

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