PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2011

MY FATHER the PRESERVATIONIST

Wilmer E. Burow
September 6, 1910 – June 10, 1995

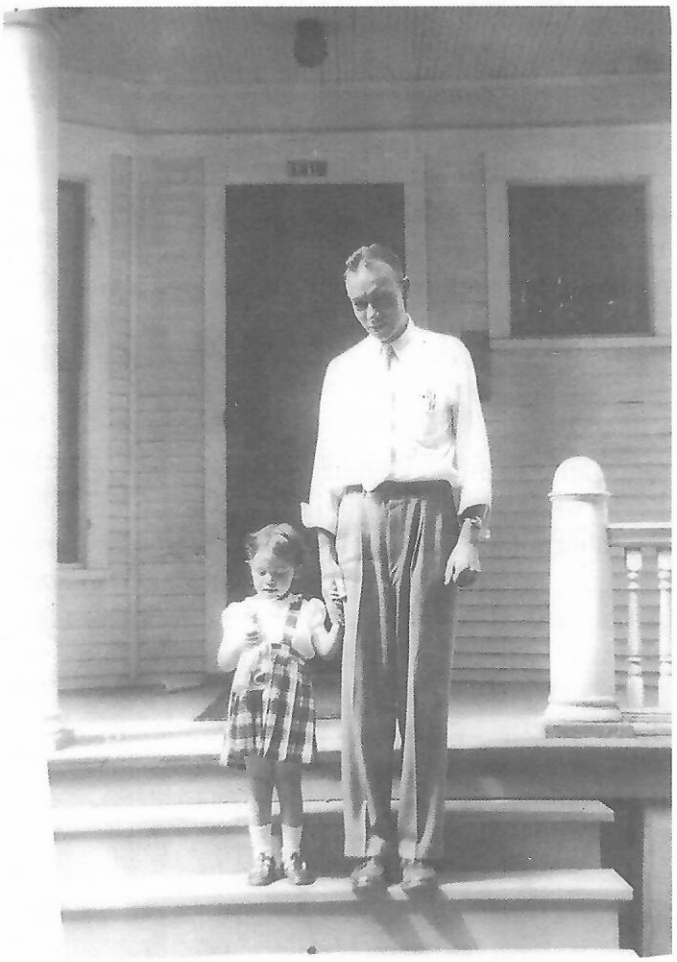
Over the forty-eight years that I knew my father, I do not recall that he ever mentioned the term "preservationist." He *certainly* never mentioned being one. That might have required some introspection and he was far too busy for that.

As a poor farm boy from Jefferson County, who had just finished high school as the salutatorian with high hopes for landing a fine accounting job in the city, the Great Depression tore apart those dreams, as did the World War. He was over forty when at last he became a CPA, proud of his training at Northwestern, and finally ready to start his own accounting business in Racine.

By that time, there could not have been anyone more enthralled with accounting. And there could not have been anyone more scarred by the Depression. So, even as my father handed me a college education on a silver platter and all the shoes I could possibly buy at Eitel's—he worked sixteen-hour days, determined to protect his clients from the IRS as well as to attain personal financial security once and for all through honest, high quality work.

That left little time for other interests. And little time for introspection. One interest was his life-long love of the clarinet that led to his forty-year membership in the Racine Park Board Band.

Another was the home that he and my mother purchased at 1418 Carlisle Avenue on July 1, 1950. Despite the fear of taking on a huge $13,000 mortgage, the house needed repairs due to the advanced age of the original owner. But from the moment my father saw the turn-of-the-century



Carol and her father in 1950, just as he began his care of 1418 Carlisle Avenue.

Continued on page two.

Dutch Colonial, it was his house. Oh, my mother lived in it for thirty-five years, decorating it ingeniously until she became too frail. I lived in it until I went to college, with countless visits to follow for the next thirty years—but all along it was really my father's house. Oh, how he loved it!

Our dinner conversation was filled with not only accounting facts and information—that could result in either sheer boredom for Mother and me, or in fascination at my father's level of knowledge and the way he could tell a dramatic story about taxes! But it was also filled with lengthy discussions of "home maintenance," and only maintenance that followed the original plan of the house. The original rose wool carpeting had to be protected from moths at all costs. White Pittsburgh Paint needed to be applied once again, even on the scalloped upper gables. The forty storm windows were ready for re-puttying. The winter moisture had to be wiped away from the gleaming woodwork's window sills each morning. Perhaps a new railing spindle needed to be carved. And of course, the front porch floor had to be kept a dazzling shiny gray.

At times my father performed the tasks, even climbing up to the high peaks in his old age to inspect the wooden siding. But most of the time he relied on workmen and eventually on a talented younger man who became like a son, Jon Braun. Never did my father lose interest in preserving his house.

Once an elegant boulevard, eventually the years began to take their toll on the Carlisle Avenue neighborhood. Sad and disturbed at the relentless changes, my father became a neighborhood guardian of sorts. He would pay to have debris from the entire alley removed. He would hire photographers to take pictures of garage graffiti, personally delivering the evidence to the police station. He complimented residents who maintained their properties, although he was secretly disheartened whenever they installed manufactured siding.

To move was unthinkable. It was better to work to preserve what had once been beautiful. But to be called a "preservationist"? In his 80s, he was still too busy to think deeply about something like that!

One of his last acts was to prepare a binder for me detailing most of the work that had been done during his 45 years at 1418 Carlisle. I was there on the day my father parted with his house. He could not catch his breath and needed the care of a hospital before his death a few days later. We walked slowly off the front porch together, marking the end of an era.

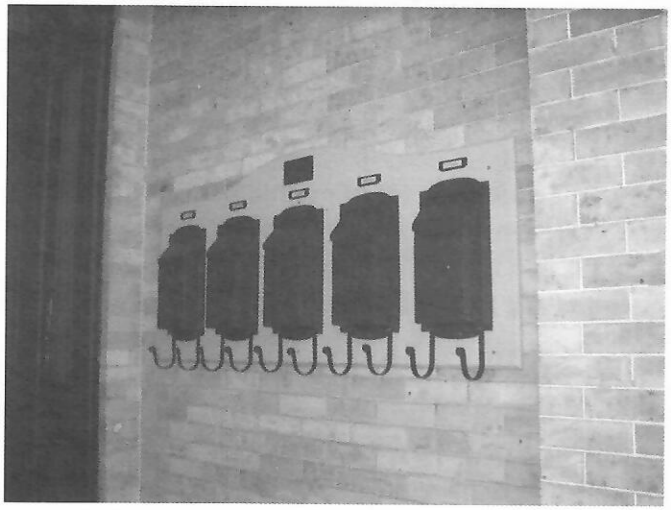
This year, when we would have celebrated his 100th birthday, my husband John and I believe it is fitting to present a gift to Preservation Racine in my father's honor. Without even knowing it, he was an exemplary preservationist.

Carol Burow Gianforte

Mailbox Project

In the spring of 2010, Carol Gianforte generously offered to donate $1,000 in memory of her parents, Ann and Wilmer Burow, to fund the replacement of the old mailboxes at the Blake House. The Blake House committee undertook the project with the objective of selecting mailboxes that would be compatible with the house, would not rust, and would be better labeled with the residents' names.

Numerous mailboxes can be found on line, but we wanted to see examples before ordering them. We found a store in Menomonee Falls called Mahvelous Mailboxes, which carries a wide variety of mailboxes, and visited there to look at various types. The Blake House committee agreed on a model that is made of cast aluminum and will not rust. We prepared a proposal, with a drawing and

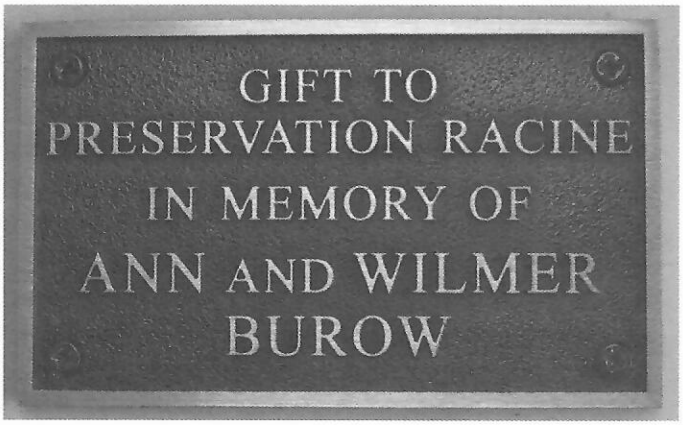


New mailboxes at the Blake House, 936 South Main Street.

cost, which was discussed with Carol in late July. She was in agreement with the proposal, so we returned to Menomonee Falls and ordered the five mailboxes and the bronze memorial plaque.

The name plate holders, which closely match the mailboxes, were ordered from Van Dyke's Restorers, Woonsocket, South Dakota.

The plaque took a little longer than anticipated, but by October we had all of the items. We laid them out on a mocked-up mounting board to make sure the spacing and dimensions were correct and then



Plaque in memory of Ann and Wilmer Burow.

ordered the new mounting board from Distinctive Woodwork in Racine. The material used is MDO exterior plywood that is widely used for highway signs and is very resistant to the elements. It was painted to match the color of the brick as closely as possible.

Considering that some day in the future the Blake House could become a single family house once again, we secured the mounting board to the mortar joints instead of drilling into the brick, since holes in the mortar can be more easily repaired.

Early in December, we mounted the plaque, the mailboxes, and the nameplate holders, and inserted the laminated name tag for each resident.

When you are passing by the Blake House, please take the time to stop and look at the mailboxes that Carol and John Gianforte so graciously provided.

Jim Fiene

UPCOMING MEETINGS

On March 7 Preservation Racine is co-sponsoring our meeting with the Racine Public Library, located at 75 Seventh Street, Racine, at 6:30 p.m. Ann Stadick, archivist for UW-Parkside, will acquaint us with the UW-Parkside Archives. She will explain how to get started in researching buildings in our community. Join us and discover where to find help in your quest. Reference Librarian, Debbie Yale, will speak to us about local documents and introduce us to their new Racine History Room, which includes a complete collection of Western Publishing's Little Golden Books and books that have connections to Racine.

The April 4 meeting will be held at Habitat Restore, located at 2302 DeKoven Avenue, at 7 p.m. Just as people can be organ donors, buildings can be material donors, giving new life to other buildings. A tour of the facility and presentation by Lois Solberg will focus on the reuse of historic artifacts and building materials. The income generated from the resale of donated items helps to rehab or build Habitat houses for our community. Diverting usable materials from our landfills is also a major goal of this project. Donations must be evaluated and approved before being dropped off. Discover a treasure there for your house!

On May 2 Preservation Racine celebrates National Preservation Month with Century Building Awards held in the Great Hall at The DeKoven Center. This event will include a reception honoring property owners at 6:30 p.m. with a program featuring photographs and historical information on each of the buildings at 7:00 p.m.

DUES ARE DUE

It is time for most members of Preservation Racine to pay their annual dues, which are due in March, unless the mailing label on this newsletter indicates a life membership ("L) or a date later than "MAR 11." Please use the form that accompanies this newsletter and indicate if you are interested in participating in any of Preservation Racine's activities. Dues may be paid at any membership meeting or mailed to Preservation Racine, Inc., P. O. Box 383, Racine, WI 53401.

Eastward Ho — In a Motor Home

The last edition of the Preservation Racine Newsletter presented an in-depth description of the Bull-Robinson stables at 1130 South Main Street. This article presents another interest of Frank Kellogg Bull, the son of Stephen Bull, one of the "Big Four" of the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company.

Mr. and Mrs. F. K. Bull purchased a winter home in Camden, South Carolina, that eventually became their retirement home. The common means of long distance travel at that time was by train. Although the automobile industry had grown by 1916, the road system was rather rudimentary. Long distance motor travel was arduous with few well established highways and routes. The challenge was met by Mr. Bull and his mobile home named *The Open Road*, pictured in these photos. The photos accompanied the following article in a yet to be identified Racine newspaper. The probable date was 1916, as that was the year Frank K. Bull retired as president of the JICTMCo.

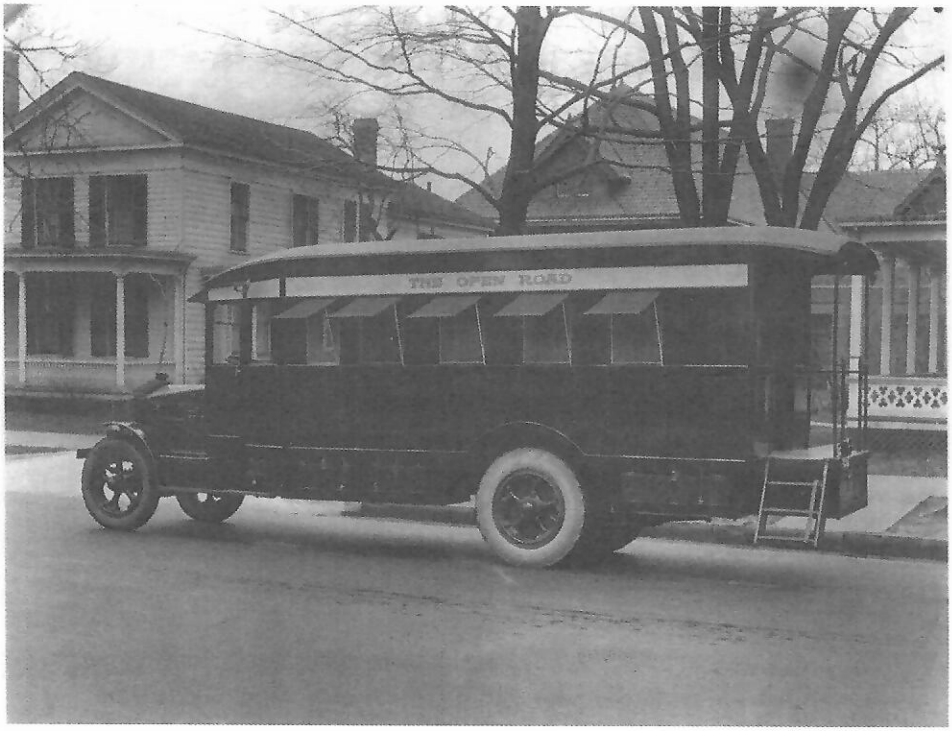
This paragraph appeared under the photographs:

Pictures show F. K. Bull, retired Racine machinery manufacturer, and his new motorized bungalow, The Open Road, in which he is en route to his winter estate in South Carolina. The interior shows the lounging room in which part of the "family of four" which the car is to accommodate uses for sleeping quarters. Beds can be folded away to make larger room space. Supplies and accessory equipment are stowed in the lockers beneath the floor, and personal articles, first aid and clothing are in case closets within the car.

The main article follows and was titled "Builds Fine Home on Truck Chassis."

The call of the open road was answered by F. K. Bull, former president of the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Co., when he with Mrs. Bull and servants left Dec. 15 for their winter home in Camden, S. C. They travel in a fine home on wheels, a commodious car filled with all the modern comforts.

It is the only car of its kind in Wisconsin. It cost between $15,000 and $20,000. It can travel on good roads or bad and yet afford the travelers as much comfort as if they were in a Pullman parlor car. It is fitted with a 50 horsepower Pierce-Arrow engine and has a tank that will hold 50 gallons of gasoline. The body was built in Racine, specially designed for Mr. Bull. It is 25 feet long and 7 feet wide and the whole outfit weighs nearly



Frank K. Bull's mobile home, *The Open Road.* In the far background is the roof of the Bull-Robinson stables at 1130 South Main Street. Immediately behind the mobile home are two houses that were later moved about a block south, to 1219 and 1225 South Main Street.

The interior of Frank. K. Bull's mobile home, *The Open Road.* In the left foreground is what appears to be a folding porch chair made by the Gold Medal Camp Furniture Manufacturing Company of Racine.

Photographs from the collection of Robert Johnson.

12,000 pounds.

The horn is a miniature pipe organ, and is operated from a keyboard. The equipment in every detail is complete and every niche and corner is utilized. It is fitted with refrigerator, toilets, sleeping quarters that transform into an elegant lounging room, and is electrically lighted. Hot water is provided by utilization of the exhaust. The car accommodates four passengers. In connection with the "car de luxe," there is a complete outfit for the kitchen and dining room facilities and tents for sleeping for 8 to 10 persons, which is so constructed that it takes but 10 minutes to set it up.

Entrance to the car is from the rear as in a Pullman. The interior is . . . with a floor covering like . . . battleship (part of the article is missing). The windows are raised and lowered with levers, after the method used in closed cars. Pretty yellow silk curtains drape the small windows, and the coverings of the beds and chairs are of attractive cretonnes. In the wall space between the windows are small case closets for first-aid supplies and toilet articles, with doors of plate glass mirror. Hat and luggage racks run the whole length of the ceiling.

In the front of the car, back of the driver's seat, is a lavatory and dressing room with numerous case closets. The Simmons beds are fitted with special mattresses. The car carries a radio receiving outfit, and a small victrola.

Mr. Bull up to a year ago was active in manufacturing circles of this city for nearly half a century. He is a prominent club man. . . . He retired in the early part of this year . . . and spends his winters in Camden and his summers in his home in Racine. Mr. Bull and his party planned to travel over the national highway to Camden and . . . be from eight to ten days en route. During the winter he will take a trip through the south and next summer a party will go through the Canadian Rockies in this car.

Barbara S. Walter

MUSEUM ARCHIVES

During the month of January, archival staff at the Racine Heritage Museum and volunteers integrated historic documents, images, and artifacts into a unique research collection.

Photographs, stereo views, glass plates, negatives, and more have been cataloged. Archive patrons now have access to "new" photos of the Root River, schooners, tugs, excursion boats, dredges, and much more.

Archive hours are Tuesdays, 1:00 to 4:30 p.m., and Saturdays, 10:00 to 1:00 p.m.

President Lincoln's Cottage

One of the recent successful historic preservation projects in America was the Soldiers' Home in Washington D.C. Few people know what it is. Most historians who do know what it is, or was, had forgotten that the building still stood in a military housing complex on an elevation of land in the northern outskirts of the nation's capitol.

Over the last thirty years, groups of Washington history buffs would periodically make pilgrimages to the cottage to sit on its porch and recall what took place inside its walls, on its lawn, and on the road that connected it to metropolitan Washington. As the house aged and fell into a state of embarrassing disrepair (for it still housed veterans who were recuperating from illness or injury), these hot-blooded historians turned into passionate preservationists. They anguished over the building's bleak future, pondered over what could be done to restore the home to its original splendor, told anybody who would listen about the building's history, and lobbied people, politicians, and organizations to save it from ruin.

A break came in 2000, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation included the Soldiers' Home in that year's list of "America's Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places." The Armed Forces Retirement Home, which owns the property, did not have the necessary funds to make a comprehensive and badly-needed restoration. President Bill Clinton soon gave the structure federal protection for perpetuity by officially designating it a national monument. In giving it a new name and designation, President Clinton honored one of his predecessors and saved an edifice that played a significant role in one of the darkest periods in American history.

A collaboration of public and private partnerships involving the National Park Service, public officials, generous donors, scholars, and organizations enthusiastically embraced the Soldiers' Home and collectively raised money to not only restore the building but assist the National Trust in developing an aggressive plan to transform what was a house of rehabilitation into a publicly accessible historic site and primary learning center. Of course, it helped that the name of this site was now called The President Lincoln and Soldiers' Home National Monument. Put Lincoln's name on something and people respond. They always have.

The Soldiers' Home has been called "the most important 'unknown' presidential site in the nation" and a "legitimate cradle of history." It is

President Lincoln and Soldiers' Home National Monument, Washington, D. C.

Photograph courtesy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

not an exaggerated claim. Lincoln chose to spend a surprising quarter of his presidency (13 months) at the Rural Gothic style cottage, built in 1842, instead of at the White House to escape the sultry summer heat and the stench that accompanied it from the Potomac River. In its rooms and on its grounds, Lincoln wrote and revised his Emancipation Proclamation, planned war strategy, conferred with his Cabinet on the issues facing the nation, and experimented with the latest in weapon technology by taking target practice with new guns.

The Lincolns were hardly secluded in their summer home. During their residency, there were a total of 200 retired military personnel who also lived nearby in adjacent buildings and interacted regularly with the president. The grounds also served as a camp for companies of soldiers who protected the president and accompanied him on his daily travels to and from the White House.

Like numerous places throughout America that have been restored because of a connection to the great Lincoln, the Soldiers' Home was successfully rescued from decay and oblivion because a few ardent lovers of history made a difference. The next time you go to Washington, visit Lincoln's Camp David.

Steve Rogstad

NATIONAL PRESERVATION MONTH

Since the National Trust for Historic Preservation created Preservation Week in 1971 to spotlight grassroots preservation efforts, it has grown into an annual celebration observed by small towns and big cities with events ranging from architectural and historic tours and award ceremonies to fund-raising events, educational programs, and heritage travel opportunities. Due to its overwhelming popularity, in 2005, the National Trust for Historic Preservation extended the celebration to the entire month of May and declared it Preservation Month to provide an even longer opportunity to celebrate the diverse and unique heritage of our country's cities and states and enable more Americans to become involved in the growing preservation movement.

CENTURY BUILDING AWARDS

For the twenty-fourth year, in honor of National Preservation Month, Preservation Racine will once again present twelve Century Building Certificates to owners of buildings in the City of Racine or Racine County that are at least one hundred years old that have been lovingly cared for, preserved, renovated, or restored. Members of this committee, Annette Cole Davis, Carol Gianforte, Bob Johnson, Jacki Mekemson, Vivian Merlo, Cathie Petersen, Marcia Pfost, Barbara Walter, and chair Pat Murphy are in the process of nominating this year's honorees. This year six of the buildings will be from the county and six from the city. The 2011 presentation of Century Building Certificates will take place, Monday, May 2, 2011, in the Great Hall at The DeKoven Center. Preservation Racine members are the hosts for this annual celebration. Please mark your calendars and plan to bring a dish to pass. This is always an enjoyable meeting.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT EXHIBIT

Experience over 150 objects designed by "America's greatest architect," Frank Lloyd Wright, in the new exhibition *Frank Lloyd Wright: Organic Architecture for the 21st Century* at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Featuring thirty-three never-before-shown drawings by the Wisconsin legend, as well as rare home movies, this forward-looking exhibition of the celebrated architect is on view February 12 through May 15, 2011.

Frank Lloyd Wright: Organic Architecture for the 21st Century celebrates the 100th anniversary of Taliesin, Wright's home, studio, and school in Spring Green, Wisconsin. The exhibition also marks the beginning of a year-long celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Santiago Calatrava-designed Quadracci Pavilion, the 2001 addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum.

Examining every type of project that Wright designed, along with his plans for suburban communities and American System-Built Homes, the exhibition includes drawings, models, photographs, videos, furniture, and more.

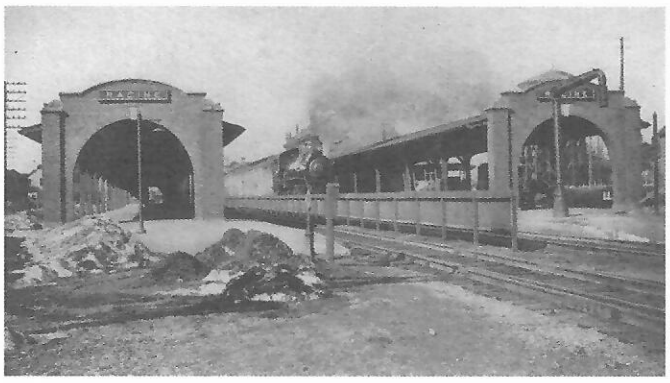
C&NW TRAIN DEPOT

Monday, April 2, 2007, Preservation Racine hosted a celebratory membership meeting at the newly renovated C&NW train depot located at 1421 State Street. It was a group of members of Preservation Racine who were instrumental in saving the depot in the 1980s. This project, which was to be completed in stages, was part of the Belle Urban Transit Center, recently renamed the Corinne Owens Transit Center.

Our City was diligent in hiring Isthmus Architects, the company who oversaw the restoration of our state capitol building, to design and oversee the depot project, with outstanding results. The Frost and Granger-designed train depot was built by the C&NW RR. in 1901-02. It is one of more than 100 station structures the firm designed for midwest railroads. Racine's depot is the last of these stations with both east and west platforms surviving.

The City of Racine, with a budget of $304,000, has once again hired Isthmus Architects to do design work for the restoration of the west platform of the depot. The project will include a new roof, public restroom facilities in the shelter building, and landscaping of the west parking area. The original train order signal mast, whose purpose was to stop trains for the delivery of orders from the dispatcher, is still in place and will be restored in the final design. The project will be completed in phases, with the canopy and structure to be completed this summer. Landscaping and a new parking lot are planned for next year.

After watching the west platform slowly deteriorate, we are grateful our City has taken on this project, and we are looking forward to celebrating another job well done.



A GIFT FROM WITHIN

In December of 2010 Preservation Racine received a gift of $1000 from board member Jacki Mekemson and her husband, Dan. The donation was offered as a restricted fund to be used for furthering the development and improvement of Preservation Racine's archives. Preservation Racine is taking this opportunity to express its thanks to the Mekemsons.

Approximately two years ago, Sharon Baldukas and her committee began working on organizing Preservation Racine's disparate collection of materials that have accumulated through the years. A few new filing cabinets and archival filing materials had been acquired along with updated electronic equipment—a new computer and a scanner/printer. There is need for much more along these lines and the Mekemson fund will help to make it possible.

To illustrate the progress made, thirty-seven of our newsletters have been digitized through the combined efforts of Sharon's committee and the UW-Parkside Archives. All of the information in those newsletters is available through a link on our website www.preservationracine.org.

PRESERVATION RACINE

Published quarterly by
Preservation Racine, Inc.
P. O. Box 383
Racine, WI 53401

President ..... Edgar Hoffman
Vice President ..... Steven Rogstad
Secretary ..... Pippin Michelli
Treasurer ..... Charles Rice
Historian ..... Sharon Baldukas

NEWSLETTER

Editors. . . . . .Roberta Fiene, Jacki Mekemson
Vivian Merlo, Barbara Walter

Office: Blake House, 936 South Main Street,
Racine, WI 53403 (262) 634-5748
www.preservationracine.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The members of Preservation Racine continue protecting and preserving Racine's historical buildings and sites. We are a vibrant organization dedicated to helping Racine. It hurts to read about other volunteer organizations in Racine closing after years of serving the community.

Recent projects at the Blake House include the purchase of a ceiling fixture from Habitat Restore (the site of our April meeting) and the installation of it in our office; the replacement of rotted wood porch nosing on the back porch with a porch nosing made from PVC, and organic and inorganic materials, that will not rot; and the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in the basement and first and second floors. Be sure to read the article about our new mailboxes in this newsletter.

May is National Preservation Month and on Monday, May 2, we will be hosting our 24th annual presentation of Century Building Certificates at The DeKoven Center.

On Saturday April 2, from 9 a.m. until noon, the Landmarks Preservation Commission will be holding workshops on home preservation. Workshops of this nature help everyone preserve and restore our older homes. My house doesn't yet qualify for a Century Building Certificate as it was built in 1918, but it does require work to maintain it and these workshops will help me.

Our April 4 membership meeting will be at Habitat Restore to learn more about how they are helping to provide the people of Racine with the old windows, etc. that we need to preserve and restore our older homes.

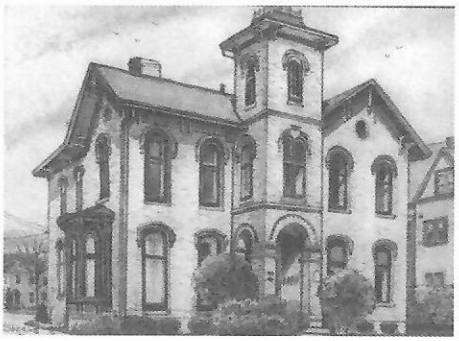
Steve Rogstad originally wrote the article about the Soldiers' Home in this newsletter for our Community Newsletter in *The Journal Times*, and we thought it was worth repeating in our newsletter, along with a photograph of this historic site. It has been a pleasure to work with Steve on the board this year.

Our annual memberships are all coming up for renewal and we need to remember to renew them.

My term as president is almost complete and I am looking forward to working with our next president and board as we continue to expand our efforts to help Racine.

If you have any questions or would like to volunteer, please contact me at edgarhoffman@att.net or feel free to contact any board member.

Edgar Hoffman



COMING UP

March Membership Meeting
Monday, March 7; 6:30 p.m.
Racine Public Library, History Room
75 Seventh Street

April Membership Meeting
Monday, April 4; 7 p.m.
Habitat Restore
2302 DeKoven Avenue

National Preservation Month
May 2011

Century Building Certificate Awards
Monday, May 2; 6:30 p.m.
Great Hall at The DeKoven Center

Wright Plus
Saturday, May 21
Oak Park, Illinois

Wright and Like
Saturday, June 11
Milwaukee

Preservation Racine Tour of Historic Places
Sunday, September 25, noon to 5:30 p.m.

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Melvin Avenue National Register Historic District

There was a joint meeting of Preservation Racine, the City of Racine Landmarks Preservation Commission, and the Wisconsin Historical Society on Tuesday, February 8, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 3011 Erie Street, regarding the proposed Melvin Avenue National Register Historic District.

Matt Sadowski, Principal Planner in Racine's Department of City Development, presented an overview of Racine's current historic districts; Daina Penkiunas, National Register Coordinator for the Wisconsin Historical Society, explained the process for listing a district on the National Register and the benefits of owning property in a National Register Historic District; and Jennifer Lehrke, Senior Architect and Historical Preservation Consultant with the firm of LJM Architects, Inc., explained the architectural and historic research, recommendations, and conclusions pertaining to the proposed Melvin Avenue National Register Historic District.

The proposed district is situated north of the downtown business district in a large residential area of Racine and is a well-defined cluster of thirty-three buildings. The area of both small and modestly sized houses began in the mid-1920s and was developed and filled in over the next two decades. Representative of the prevailing architectural styles of their time, Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Bungalow, Dutch Colonial Revival, and Spanish Colonial Revival style residences are prominent within the district. The result is now one of Racine's most architecturally intact historic residential areas.

The program included a PowerPoint presentation showing the boundaries of the district and pictures and information about some of the key buildings in the district. Presenters also answered questions in their areas of expertise.

The nomination will be sent to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). After reviewing it, the SHPO sends the nomination to the state's historic review board, which then recommends whether the State Historic Preservation Officer should forward the nomination to the Keeper of the National Register. After the nomination is recommended for listing in the National Register by the SHPO, the nomination is sent to the National Park Service, which approves or denies the nomination. If approved, the property is officially entered by the Keeper of the National Register into the National Register of Historic Places.