PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2012

American Four-square House

About the time of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, late picturesque architectural styles, such as Queen Anne and Shingle, were being nudged out of vogue by the English Arts and Crafts Movement both here and in Europe. The Victorian era was coming to an end followed by the Edwardian era. Americans were becoming less inclined to look to Europe for cultural influences. American cities were growing and new neighborhoods were being established. In the Midwest a new Prairie architectural style was developing. In Chicago a group of architects, called "The Eighteen," met regularly to exchange new ideas. Frank Lloyd Wright was among them. Many members of that group were included in what became known as the Prairie School.

In 1893 Wright designed the Winslow house in River Forest, Illinois. It was the precursor to his Brown house, a 1905 project which he hoped would become a model for a modest subdivision. That dream did not develop; however, the seeds for the two-story American Four-square Prairie House had been sown and would be a dominant style in American home building until 1920. The strong horizontal lines, evidenced in the extended eaves and echoed in the single-story full-width front porch roof edges, suggest anchoring the building to the prairie landscape. The solid, plain, clean lines are in sharp contrast to those of the Victorian period.

Other common exterior features of the Four-square house are the low pitched hip roof and the centered dormer or dormers in the attic. Double-hung sash windows are placed symmetrically

Brick American Four-square house at 1145 South Main Street. A. Arthur Guilbert, a prominent local architecht, designed and oversaw the construction of this house in 1907.

Frame Four-square house at
1715 College Avenue.

and porch piers tend to be substantial. The front door may be centered or off-center. The houses may be of brick, stone, clapboard, stucco, or variations including half-timbering.

Initially the Prairie Four-square appeared in high-style versions in Chicago suburbs. Although the name implies four rooms on each level, many houses have three rooms on the first floor and an entrance hallway to the side with a stairway leading to the four rooms on the second floor. The interior affords economical ample and livable space that came to the attention of the general public. It was adaptable to small lots and a vernacular version of the four-square house was soon built throughout the Midwest. Its popularity quickly spread throughout the country and plans were readily available through pattern books, catalogs, such as Sears, and popular magazines. The plans were also referred to as the American Four-square and the Prairie Box.

In Racine the Prairie Four-square is prominent in many neighborhoods that were developed during those years. Take a look and enjoy the view!

Nothing exists in a vacuum and as all this was taking place in the fields of architecture and construction, the United States was becoming a world force. In 1893, when Wright designed the Winslow house, Grover Cleveland was president, Thomas Edison set up a moving picture lot in West Orange, N.J., Eugene V. Debs founded the American Railway Union, and the state of Colorado enacted voting rights for women. By 1905 when the Brown house was built, the Klondike Gold Rush had happened. Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders had fought in the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt became president following the assassination of President William McKinley, the first Rose Bowl game had taken place, the Wright brothers had flown their plane at Kitty Hawk, N.C., and the Panama Canal was being built.

In the next few years San Francisco experienced a terrible earthquake, Ford produced the Model-T, the Boys Scouts of America was founded, the first aircraft took off from the deck of a ship, and the Titanic sank. In 1914 Woodrow Wilson was president. That year was tragic for Frank Lloyd Wright. An employee burned Taliesin killing all who were there including Mamah Borthwick Cheney and her two children.

The year 1917 marked the United States entry into World War I, a few years later the Volstead Act brought Prohibition to the country, and in 1920 women received the right to vote in national elections, regardless of what the voting laws were in individual states. It was at this time the popularity of the Prairie Four-square house came to an end.

Barbara Walter

HISTORY DETECTIVES . . .

Among the donations to the archives made recently by Joshua Drew is a drawing by John Randal McDonald of a beach and community house for Wind Point directed to Richard Harvey Jr. No other details were included.

The site plan for the beach and community house includes a promenade deck; sunken court and play area; a commons with a stage; beach and roof terraces; a fireplace, kitchen, and grill; and hillside gardens. The point of the beach and community house closest to Lake Michigan is approximately seventy feet from the water.

It appears that there could have been a second stage to the project indicated by "future pool" and "future cabanas."

The bird's-eye view and section are reproduced on the back page of this newsletter.

In view of the fact that the architect and Judge and Mrs. Harvey are deceased, Preservation Racine is asking its members and friends to share any information about the proposed project to make the archive material more meaningful and complete.

WRIGHT PLUS

The 38th annual Wright Plus house walk will be held Saturday, June 2, in Oak Park, Illinois. It will feature interior tours of nine private homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his contemporaries plus entry to three landmark Wright buildings. See gowright.org for more details.

WRIGHT & LIKE

Wright & Like 2012 will be June 8-10 in Spring Green, Wisconsin. The Saturday house tour will feature works by some of Wright's best known apprentices and the Friday night event will be at Taliesin. More details will be posted later at info@WrightInWisconsin.org.

UP-COMING MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Monday, March 5, at 7:00 p.m., the Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church will be the site of our membership meeting. You will hear the history of this significant historic building, its stained glass windows, and the congregation. The church, located on the corner of Seventh Street and College Avenue, is handicapped accessible.

Monday, April 2, at 7:00 p.m., we have the special opportunity to meet at the Golden Rondelle for our membership meeting. Barbara Walter and Pippin Michelli will talk about the book, *1893 Racine, Wis., Illustrated.* Barbara has researched the buildings and their locations. The Golden Rondelle is located near the corner of Fourteenth and Howe streets and is part of the SC Johnson complex. At this meeting we will hold our annual election of the Board of Directors for Preservation Racine.

All members and friends of Preservation Racine are invited to attend.

CENTURY BUILDING AWARDS

This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of Preservation Racine's annual presentation of Century Building Certificates to owners of buildings in the City of Racine or Racine County that are at least one hundred years old and that have been lovingly cared for, preserved, renovated, or restored.

Members of this committee are Jan Carter, Robin Coventry, Roberta Fiene, Carrie Hemmig, Jacki Mekemson, Vivian Merlo, Pat Murphy, and Barbara Walter.

The celebration will take place Monday evening, May 7, in the Great Hall at The DeKoven Center, beginning with a reception at 6:30 honoring the building owners, followed by the presentation of century certificates at 7:00.

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

IMAGES FROM THE PAST

Jim Mercier, a Preservation Racine board member, recently donated a hard-to-find book to our archives, *1893 Racine, Wis., Illustrated*, published in 1893 by The Art Gravure & Etching Co., Milwaukee.

The introduction describes Racine as "situated upon the elevated shores of Lake Michigan at the mouth of Racine River, and at the extremity of a point of land extending some three miles into the lake. Its elevation of about thirty feet above the waters of the lake gives it excellent drainage and absolute freedom from malaria, and its extension into the lake, giving it a succession of lake breezes in the summer, renders its climate most delightful in that oppressive part of the year, and at the same time mitigates the severity of winter's cold. . . . Its harbor is one of the most beautiful upon the lake, and with its three and a half miles of dockage, and practically unlimited opportunity for additional harbor, gives easy and cheap facilities for the receipt and shipment of merchandise to all points accessible by water, either fresh or salt.

"It is the junction of two great Northwestern railroad systems, the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul, and the Chicago & North-Western Railroads, and is therefore favored by railroad freight rates, both for receiving and shipping. . . . It is a most advantageous point for the receipt of lumber, coal or iron by vessel and for their distribution by rail to interior points, and that business is already largely developed.

The narrative continues, covering the topics of its residences and parks shaded by "elms, maple and oaks of magnificent growth. . . . the magnificent supply of pure water from Lake Michigan, the purest and best of the great lakes, being taken from a point seven thousand feet beyond the shore, in deep water and free from possible impurities; besides which may be noted its many artesian wells drawing water from about thirteen hundred feet below the surface, of the most absolute purity from organic matter and highly impregnated with health-giving mineral properties."

Racine's people are described as "economical, industrious, and conservative" and "of a class above that of almost any other place in the country."

It concludes by addressing the financial condition of the city, which is described as excellent. A table of exports (boats, steam engines, boilers, wagons, carriages, trunks, boots, shoes, woolen cloths, rubber clothing, leather, school furniture, springs, baskets) indicates the development of manufacturing and shipping already achieved, the great variety of products, and the skilled labor force.

However, it is what follows that is the treasure of this book—74 identified photographs of street-

"The New Hotel"
Hotel Racine at the northeast corner of Main and Sixth streets.

"Residence of L. S. Blake"
936 South Main Street

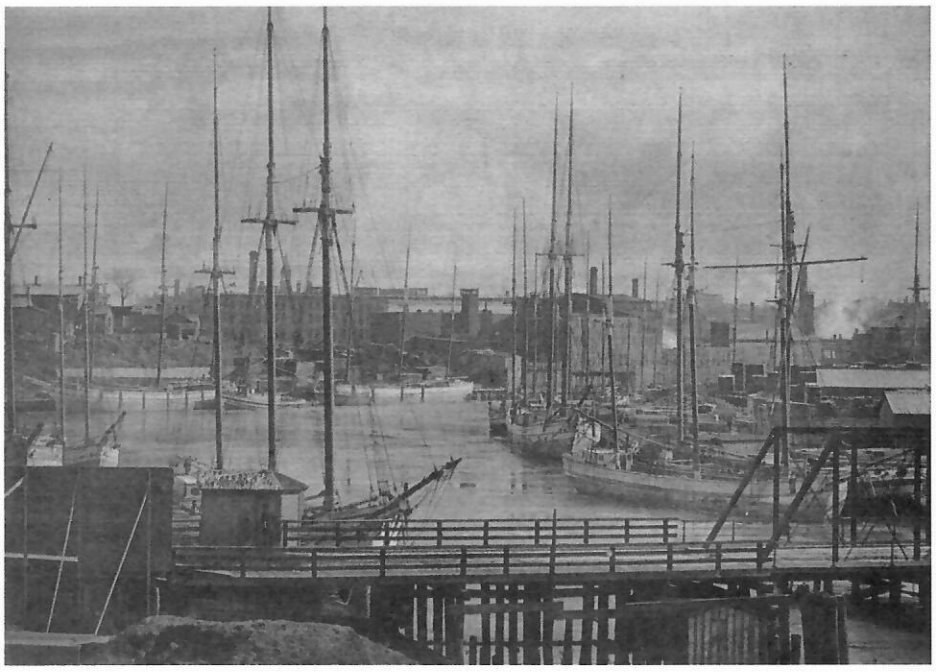
scapes, residences, schools, churches, businesses, and manufacturing industries. To enhance this information for researchers, Barbara Walter has added addresses and information.

Historian Sharon Baldukas, with the help of UW-Parkside archivist, Anna Stadik, has put this book on a DVD, which will be available for purchase for $10 at our April membership meeting.

Thank you Jim, Barbara, and Sharon for this valuable reference book.

* * *

Preservation Racine also received the donation of two more research tools at the February membership meeting. PR member Clem Krivich copied and bound for our archive the 1895 Racine edition of the *Headlight* and the 1911 *Greater Racine: Interesting Views of Public Buildings, Churches, Schools, Street Scenes, Handsome Residences, and Manufacturing Industries.* Thank you, Clem. We will review both in a future newsletter.



"The Commerce of Racine"
View East from
Chippecotton Street
(Mound Avenue)

WEST PLATFORM AND DEPOT UPDATE

On 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 our members 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, now Corinne Owens, bus transfer site. This 1902, award-winning Frost and Granger train depot was one of 52 depots built for the C&NW Transportation Company. Racine's depot is the last of these depots with both the east and west platforms surviving. Preservation Racine would like to commend our city leaders for preserving and investing in the depot and the platforms. Isthmus Architecture, which did the initial design work on the depot, again was contracted for professional services from the design phase through construction on the west platform (cost $54,667.87). Ricchio, Inc. did the construction at a cost of $443,467.00. A HUD Economic Development grant funded $405,000.00 of these expenses; the remainder was funded through Racine's annual bonded capital projects. The Preservation Racine newsletter committee asked PR member, Keith M. Kohlmann, to write a review on this phase of the depot project. It helps to explain the many details to be considered for this seemingly "simple" restoration. Kudos to everyone involved in this project.

The editors

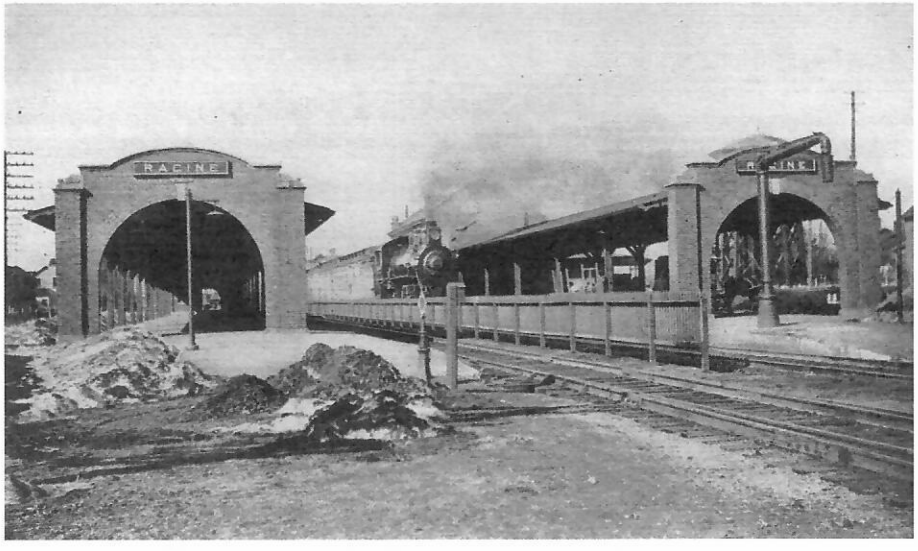
The latest phase in the restoration of the Racine depot on State Street was completed during January-October 2011. The work included restoration of the shelter and shed, site grading, fencing, new paving, and new restroom facilities in the shelter building.

The shelter was badly damaged after the property was sold by the railroad. The terrazzo floor and stairway to the tunnel were jack-hammered and filled in with rubble. The contractor had to build a new floor before the restrooms and furnace room could be installed. New windows and doors were made for the building. All new underground water, sewer, gas, electricity, and telephone lines now reach the building. Bright security lighting and a dry sprinkler system are located beneath the shelter roof. Building utilities and the security system are remotely monitored.

The chimney and part of the west wall were taken apart and rebuilt with the original bricks. The masonry work was so skillfully done that the rebuilt areas look original. The south window of the shelter had to be converted into a door for the utility room, but this conversion was done with sensitivity to the original design of the structure. The new door matches other doors on the building. The original Sanborn train order mast was not removed, and part of the platform curb was repaired.

The shelter restoration required replacement of beadboard under the roof, shingles, and some wooden beams and canopy braces. The shelter was painted, but the contractors did not match the trim color used on the main depot building.

Concrete sidewalks and curbs were built around the shelter to create some angled parking and a



Chicago & North Western depot and west platform, Racine, Wis.

driveway. Access from Liberty Street has been cut off. The open spaces beneath the shelter were paved with compacted gravel. Low lying areas were created for rain garden plants in the parking lot.

At present, the whole area is fenced off. The old tavern (Cooper Station post office) is unoccupied. There was talk about relocating the Saturday morning downtown farmers' market from the CNH parking lot to the west platform next season.

The city is restoring the depot in phases, and the current phase of the west platform upgrade is complete. The west platform is now in better condition than the main depot building, which still suffers from water damage. The main structure was never completely tuck-pointed. The moisture reaches the interior and causes the plaster to crumble. Tuck-pointing and the restoration of the east platform is the last of the work that needs to be done around the depot. Platform paving would not need to be done, as there is no train service.

Keith M. Kohlmann

PRESERVATION RACINE

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

President ..... Steven Rogstad
Vice President ..... Holly Hess
Secretary ..... Joshua Drew
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

COMING UP

March Membership Meeting
Monday, March 5; 7:00 p.m.
Olympia Brown Unitarian
Universalist Church
625 College Avenue
(See article on page 3.)

April Membership Meeting
Monday, April 2; 7:00 p.m.
Golden Rondelle
Fourteenth and Howe streets
(See article on page 3.)

National Preservation Month
May 2012
Discover America's Hidden Gems

Century Building Certificate Awards
Monday, May 7; 6:30 p.m.
Great Hall at The DeKoven Center

Wright Plus
Saturday, June 2
Oak Park, Illinois

Wright and Like
Saturday, June 8-10
Spring Green, Wisconsin

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

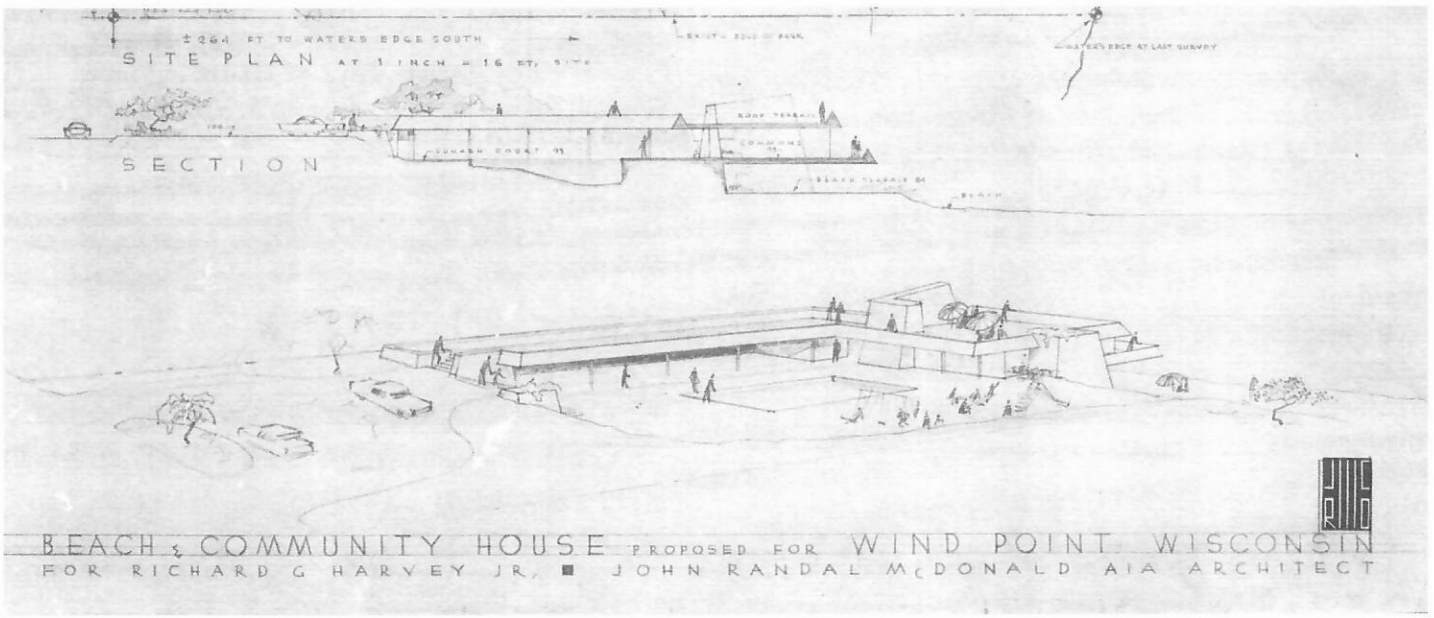
DUES ARE DUE

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 12." 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

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

Return Service Requested

Non Profit Org.
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Racine, Wisconsin
Permit No. 242



Section view and bird's-eye view of the Beach and Community House proposed for Wind Point, Wisconsin, by John Randal McDonald, and prepared for Richard Harvey Jr. (See article on page 3.)