

The Washburn Tapestry: Weaving a Sense of Place

Washburn Neighborhood,
La Crosse, Wisconsin

Compiled by UW – La Crosse Public History Class, Fall 2003

Edited by Ann M. Clark

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Preface

In September of 2003, Professor Charles Lee, a Professor of History at UW – La Crosse approached the Washburn Neighborhood Association, offering to work on a project for the association. As a result of that offer, Professor Lee's Public History class was tasked with preparing historic sites nominations, developing a walking tour of the neighborhood, and conducting neighborhood oral history interviews.

The Historic Sites Group consisted of the following students: Andrea Thompson, Nic Filla, Sara Wannemuehler, Emily Stelloh, Erika Drake, Gretchen Henricks, Emily Endo, Brian Gerber, Jacob Armstrong, and Patrick Amlaw, Eric Servais, and Courtney Felly. These students were tasked with researching historic structures in the neighborhood and preparing a City of La Crosse Historic Landmark Nomination.

The Walking Tour and Pamphlet Group consisted of Heather Przybylski, Amy Kimmet, Vince Kube, Andy Winkel, Jennifer Ott, Jason Wong, Jim Graracker, Seng Moua, Derek Oppelt, Kyle Brekke, Ryan Brandt, Devin Freedlund, and Nick Ward. The majority of members worked on a walking tour of churches in the Washburn Neighborhood, while the remaining four members compiled a memory map.

The Oral History Group consisted of Jake Spielbauer, Leo Clark, Rachel Van Alstine, Carrie Erickson, Brian Louis, Chao Vue, Josh Hiles, Stacy Gabriel, and Taylor Ritchie. These students were tasked with interviewing people who lived or worked in the neighborhood in order to record their memories as well as compile a memory book.

Acknowledgements and Contributors

This project would not have been possible without the contributions of many individuals, organizations, and institutions: the students from Professor Lee's Public History Class, the individuals who contributed short memories for the Washburn Neighborhood Memory Map, the interviewees who graciously took time away from their busy lives to be interviewed, the Washburn Neighborhood Association and its many members, Professor Charles Lee, and of course, the people who live and work in the Washburn Neighborhood and make it such a special place.

The following is an alphabetical listing of the individuals who were interviewed. These interviews provided the majority of source material for this book:

Joan Henthorn: Joan was raised in the Washburn Neighborhood during the 1950s and attended Lincoln Middle School. As an adult, she worked as a reading teacher at Lincoln for 31 years. After retiring from the La Crosse School District, she now job shares as an advisor for Education majors at Viterbo University. Joan was interviewed by Rachel Van Alstine and Caroline Erickson.

William and Mary Ipsen: William and Mary both grew up in the Washburn Neighborhood. William and Mary Ipsen were interviewed by Rachel Van Alstine and Caroline Erickson.

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: Sister Ladonna attended Viterbo College. After several years of teaching, she returned to Viterbo and served in the position of business manager for ten years. At the time of her interview, she was the Director of Development for St. Rose Convent for the Franciscan Sisters. She was interviewed by Jake Spielbauer.

Sister Jeanine Luger: She has lived in La Crosse for 14 years and worked at Viterbo University for several years. She was interviewed by Chao Vue.

Kevin Mack: Kevin is a new resident of the Washburn Neighborhood, having moved there in the past decade. He and his wife are raising a family in the neighborhood and own several rental properties there. He was interviewed by Brian Louis.

Father Tom O'Neill: Father O'Neill is the Director of Campus Ministry for Viterbo University. He has been there 10 years as the campus priest and chaplain, and also teaches courses in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Departments. He was interviewed by Stacy Gabriel and Taylor Ritchie.

Carol Petrowski: Carol was born here in La Crosse, but moved away after college. She returned to La Crosse in 1996 and has lived in the Washburn Neighborhood. She was interviewed by Stacy Gabriel and Taylor Ritchie.

L. John Sagen: John is a lifelong resident of La Crosse. Although John lived on the Northside of La Crosse, he attended Aquinas High School. John also worked as a long-time employee at Heileman's Brewery. He was interviewed by Leo Clark.

Stanley Thomas: Stanley grew up in La Crosse and was an employee of the brewery for 42 years. He was interviewed by Joshua D. Hiles.

The Neighborhood: Past, Present, and Future

The Washburn Neighborhood was named after a prominent citizen and former resident of the Washburn Neighborhood and La Crosse. Cadwallader C. Washburn served as a Civil War General, a U. S. Congressman, and a Wisconsin Governor. His original residence was located at the heart of the Washburn Neighborhood at 612 Ferry Street. The neighborhood itself is one of the oldest in La Crosse and represents a diverse neighborhood that was home to many notable citizens as well as many working class people in La Crosse.

Between 1997 and 2001, several organizations that call the Washburn Neighborhood home began meeting to discuss issues and areas for improvement in the community. These institutions: Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Viterbo University, Franciscan Skemp Medical Center, Aquinas Catholic Schools, and Chileda, asked the City of La Crosse Planning Department for assistance in developing a neighborhood plan. A Neighborhood Association was officially formed in 2001.

The Neighborhood Association developed a plan, which was designed to address concerns and establish a foundation for the public and private sectors to improve conditions in the neighborhood. According to the Washburn Neighborhood Plan from July 2002, the plan's goals consist of the following:

- Educate both city government and neighborhood residents about each other's concerns and visions for the future,
- Promote collaboration between the city and the neighborhood in order to achieve mutual goals and a shared sense of responsibility,
- Create a "sense of place" within the community by identifying and developing the assets within each neighborhood,
- Initiate change, rather than simply reacting to it, by addressing specific issues and opportunities,
- Strengthen the city by strengthening neighborhoods.

The Washburn Neighborhood is a diverse neighborhood in all respects. The physical borders of the neighborhood begin at the Mississippi River and extend eastward along Jackson Street. The eastern border follows West Avenue from Jackson Street to Main Street until it reaches 7th Street. The border then extends southward to Cass Street where it extends westward once again until reaching the Mississippi. Within these physical borders, a diverse neighborhood exists and continues to thrive upon its own uniqueness.


Washburn Neighborhood's diversity is evident in the types of structures there. The structures themselves range in age from 1850 to present day. These structures include single family and multi-family dwellings to commercial and manufacturing structures, blending both public and private spaces. The diversity of the neighborhood is also evident in the demographics

of the neighborhood. Population age ranges from newborns to elderly and consists of Caucasians, African-Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics.¹

The diversity of the neighborhood is also evident in the information that was compiled by Professor Charles Lee's Public History class in Fall 2003. The people interviewed and their memories that follow in the next section represent this diversity and reflect what an asset it is to the Washburn Neighborhood.

¹ City of La Crosse Planning Department & the Washburn Neighborhood Association, *Washburn Neighborhood Plan, La Crosse, Wisconsin July 2002*, 1, 5, 49-71.

The Stories of Washburn Neighborhood...



Many of the people interviewed expressed similar thoughts about the diversity in ethnicity and religious beliefs in the neighborhood. In addition, many suggested the Washburn Neighborhood is unique because so many of the community members are working together to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives there.

Those Who Live in the Neighborhood

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: There are a lot [of people] who are retired and are on a fixed income. We have Stokey Towers and Stoffel Court, which are both low-income housing developments in this area. Some are graduates of St. Francis School of Nursing and came back here to retire. With the Stokey Towers and Stoffel Court, I suspect that many of them did live in this neighborhood and now because of income and so on, are still living here.

One group in the neighborhood that would be new is the Hmong from Southeast Asia. They have a religion that's different from ours, but I think they are a very believing people, too.

Carol Petrowski: I like the diversity here of the people. I like having some elderly, some students, some young children, and some of everything. Living in Los Angeles for all those years was of course a big shock to go from here to there. I knew virtually no minorities and everybody was pretty much just like me growing up. All that changed, of course, when I got to Los Angeles. Suddenly there were people who didn't look like me, who spoke different languages and everything was different. When I came back here to visit, which I did all the time because my mother still lived here, I could see little changes occurring. It wasn't until I came back to live that it really hit me that there are ethnic groups here in La Crosse. There are gangs and there are big city problems. Certainly not to the extent that there are in Los Angeles, but there are things here that certainly weren't in existence when I was growing up. I don't know how much of that is unique to La Crosse because I think that has happened to small towns all over, but my little personal Mayberry had become kind of a big city.

I think that in this particular neighborhood where we are now that has the name of Washburn Neighborhood, there is still an element that is like it used to be. We know some of our immediate neighbors and we see them all the time. We have only been here for five or six years, but the woman to our south has been here for maybe thirty years and the person who lived upstairs from us had been here for twenty years. There is some longevity.

Father Tom O'Neill: I think you have to be sensitive to the fact that a lot of the folks in this neighborhood are Southeast Asians. Their culture is very different, and they do things

differently. They live together and don't tend to mix outside of their own culture as much as we might mix if we were in a German and Irish neighborhood. They kind of stay more with each other. So there's a little bit of that that goes on. I'm not saying that it's discriminating against anybody, but they just have their own way of doing things, and they just don't participate as much outside of their own family unit. We've been working to try and break that down.

And I know a lot of people live around here...I see our council woman there, and county board people, and people I know that live across the street or a few doors down, so that impacts on the neighborhood, too.

Stanley Thomas: I never knew what the neighborhood ethnicity was. They used to say when we were younger that the city was one third German, one third Scandinavian, and one third everything else.

Joan Henthorn: I think that probably the biggest change in the neighborhood, just as an observer and a teacher in this area, is that it is far more diverse. The people who live in this area now...there are probably some of these long time people that you were talking about that have lived there for ever and ever and ever and then you have a lot of Hmong families. Now, [there are] African Americans, and I think that there is an influx of students also.

I am happy to see that there are there is such a mix of people: the people who had lived there forever, the influx of Hmong, the influx of African Americans, the college students, I mean what a perfect place to study people from.

Kevin Mack: I live on the street where the a majority of it is rental housing. I even rent out a portion of my house to someone else. They [my renters] are basically young professionals. I have rented out to college kids, but it is usually people who were students here, graduated from one of the academic institutions, and know what a nice neighborhood this is. That is the market that I have been fortunate to tap into.

There are only a couple families that live on my block and I know those people. I enjoy the diversity and meeting and seeing all of the different people.

The age of the people in my area ranges from my three and half month old to across the street from me is a woman who my family befriended when we first came here. She's now 98. There are a lot of elderly nuns from the Franciscan sisters that are from this neighborhood, too. A lot of them are getting up there in years. There are also a lot of young kids around here and a lot of young parents, too.

I have been here seven years now. There are a lot of students that stay here for two or four years and then are gone. But the families that are there have been there and seem to be interested in continuing to stay there. I know a few different people that have asked me of availability of

houses in the area. There seems to be a lot of interest and demand that I feel is going to continue.

Their Beliefs and Faith

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: I would think [most people are] Roman Catholic, but I'm not totally sure of that. There probably are strong Lutherans also. And as I said, with the Hmong population now we probably have some of the Animist religion, too. But, I think there is still a good concentration of Catholic faith.

[REDACTED]

In this section, the individuals interviewed discussed the role of family and social activities in the neighborhood. The diversity of memories ranged from playing games to neighborhood get-togethers, and from spending time at the La Crosse Public Library to Houska Park to the YMCA, all assets of the Washburn Neighborhood.

William Ipsen: I came home from fishing and left my tackle box on the walk coming back here. Nobody would ever touch it. I had a boathouse down on Brownsville Bay. I didn't go down there for a week... and that stuff was worth money! A week later, I went down there and it was still sitting there.

We had a walkway going down a bank to my boathouse. On the way home one time, my wallet fell out of my pocket when I was going across that walkway on the rocks. I didn't notice it for two or three days that I didn't have it. And I thought, "What did I do with it? Well, geez, that's the only place I could've lost it." I went down there and it was lying there. Nobody had ever picked it up!

Childhood Memories

La Crosse Public Library

My fondest memory is during the summer reading program. Climbing to the second floor and eagerly waiting to see the Walt Disney films on the movie projector, or watching a puppet show or having a story read to us.

--Kathy K.

La Crosse Public Library

My fondest memory of working at the library is seeing the children so excited to sing their favorite songs at story time.

--Pam Laylan

Joan Henthorn: We moved into this area after my parents divorced. I must have been in second grade. We lived on Seventh Street between Mississippi and Jackson. We lived in an upstairs apartment, but in a single family home. A lot of the homes were two story large homes. It was a working class neighborhood, as I recall. Everybody felt safe. I don't think parents were afraid to allow their children to go outside and play. We played outside in the early evening. There were children who lived downstairs. I have a younger sister who was three and a half years younger. The people who lived downstairs had two boys who were exactly the same age as my sister and I were. So we played together a lot. There were also people who lived next door who had several children. Everybody lived fairly close. It was nothing for someone to just walk over to someone else's house and play outside. Our parents weren't worried about us being outside. They watched over us, but they weren't afraid somebody was going to come along and take us. We played games in the yard. We rode bikes and we played jacks. We played jump rope. We had roller skates that you use on the sidewalk, not in a roller rink.

In the evening, we would play "Star Light, Star Bright." We didn't usually play in the street because it was a pretty busy street. Jackson was a busy street, and cars would turn on and off of that street onto Seventh Street. So Seventh was somewhat of a thoroughfare over to Market and Cass, and then south to Lutheran Hospital, which is what it was called then.

We used to make leaf houses in the fall. There was a big side yard and a large backyard. We would actually go out and rake. We would make the walls of the house and then divide it into the rooms like we were the leaf architects of the neighborhood.

In the winter, we would use our sleds outside. We would make snowmen. We would make snow forts and we would throw our snowballs. I was happy to see snow then because we would make some great forts. You know, ones you could actually go into; they weren't just walls. We went ice-skating a lot at Hood Park. We would go to Powell Park and skate a lot. I loved to ice skate.

You know how kids have milestones, "When I get to be this age and I get to do blank." One of them would be to go to the neighborhood grocery store. There used to be a lot of neighborhood grocery stores. The one closest to where we lived on 7th Street was on 6th and Winnebago. The store is still there, but I don't know what the building is used for now. It was an IGA store; there were a lot of little IGA stores. If you drove around in this area here, you would see buildings that you could probably identify as neighborhood grocery stores. I can remember being allowed to walk to the store to buy something and then come home. That was a big excursion to be able to do that by yourself.

Carol Petrowski: It was a very nice place to grow up. I loved it. I spent almost every day of every summer for about six or seven years at the tennis courts at UW – La Crosse. For a while there, I was actually a pretty good tennis player. I liked to tell people that I could beat Tim and Tom Gullikson, who were professional tennis players. Of course, I was about five or six years older than they were and they were just learning how to hold the racket, but I could beat them. And, you know, I think back to it and it was a wonderful place to grow up. I loved the neighborhood.

We would go over to the Southside Beach. We would either ride our bikes or walk. It was not a big deal to walk over the bridge and go to the beach. I think [the marsh was a hot spot for activity] maybe for the boys like my brother who was a few years older than me. He was a lot more adventurous and found these to be exciting places. My girlfriends and I would sit around and do our girl things. I didn't venture out too far until I discovered tennis and then it was all the time at the tennis courts.

William and Mary Ipsen: When we were young, [we played games like] Red Light, hopscotch, and Kick the Can! And our kids did that same thing. You know, they did that, too. And, on the Fourth of July, we had our fireworks here.

There were all kinds of neighborhood softball or baseball teams. The girls played ball, too. On West Avenue over here, the park there had two ball diamonds. The girls played on one end; the boys played on the other. It was a huge area.

Mary Ipsen: They even had ball for us when we worked in a factory. They had a women's ball team that played over here at Chiplock. We were maybe 23 or 24 years old. It was fun.

John Sagen: It was the start of rock'n'roll. I remember when Elvis was at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium down on Vine Street by the old City Hall. The kids were just absolutely wild. All of his gyrations and everything just started a new era. We went to a private school and I can remember distinctly that the priest called all the girls over to the rectory. He gave them a sermon on morals. This guy, Elvis Presley, was jumping around. He was too suggestive. Even songs like 'Wake Up, Little Suzy' that suggested you were going steady, and that was a no-no. You weren't supposed to be going steady.

One of the things I thought about was the polio problem that we had. I know my sister and my wife were both Polio Pioneers, where they went and got vaccinated. I think I was vaccinated a little bit later than that, but you had certain areas where you had to go. I think my wife said she was bused down to West Salem for her inoculation. The new cases of polio were always on the radio. Jack Martin was one of the local newscasters at the time. He would always say that there were two new cases of polio in town today. My mother would always insist that on hot days, the kids slow down, take a nap, or relax. You know we never did slow down. If we did, it was for five minutes, and away we'd go again.

My family spent a lot of time at my grandmother's house. It was a central meeting point for the whole family. That's what people seemed to do on a Sunday afternoon. They'd sit there and talk, play cards, or have beer. I can remember when I was a smaller child, my grandma would call up the tavern down on the corner and say, "We're going to send our grandson down. He's going to get a pail of beer for us." So I would go down the alley and go in the back door and they'd have the beer ready for me and I'd bring it back home. Then the older people would sit and drink the beer and play cards and have a good time. And now, the tavern keepers don't dare serve anybody young, but I guess that was different in those days.

When we were younger, our house was heated by an oil space heater. When we got up to go to school in the morning, the house was naturally chilly because the kitchen stove had gone out. We were burning coal and wood. Unless you got up every couple of hours and stoked that up, the back part of the house would be cold. So you'd have to, more or less, have to take your overalls and we had a blower unit on the oil space heater. And you'd blow warm air up your pants legs before you'd slip into those. It was cold in the morning. People nowadays, you know they slip out of bed on a nice warm floor and turn up the thermostat.

Bringing the Community Together

Neighborhood picnic sponsored by Aquinas High School.

---Anonymous

Carol Petrowski: We certainly have tried [to have local neighborhood get-togethers] with the Washburn Neighborhood group. We had our neighborhood/potluck at the Junior High down here.

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: One of the things we have done – St. Rose Convent, Franciscan Sisters, and Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, Viterbo University, Chileda, and Aquinas – the five groups have gotten together over the last four or five years. We've really made a concerted effort to get to know the neighborhood. In May, we have a neighborhood picnic, which is really nice. There's a big tent over on the Viterbo lawn and we invite them to come. We draw for door prizes and then we have brats or hamburgers. People are kind of looking forward to that every year now. They expect the invitation, and I think that's been a good thing to get to know your neighbors so we try to do this cooperatively and collaboratively. I think that's a positive thing that's happening. October 4th is the Feast of St. Francis and the Sunday either before or after that, we distribute loaves of bread throughout the neighborhood and just wish them well. I think as a neighborhood group, the five institutions really work together.

Father Tom O'Neill: The thing we have here that involves people in the neighborhood is our theater and the theater program. We have a Bright Star season. Our theater holds about 1,100 people and it's usually sold out for our Bright Star performances. Then we have Next Star season, which is four or five shows geared toward people in their twenties or thirties. We have a children's program, where school kids from all over the city come for particular programs. They'll be coming now to see Amal and the Night Visitors, and they have special daytime shows for the students. So it's not just neighborhood kids necessarily, but all neighbors. We have our own theater season and people from the neighborhood come.

Things to Do in the Neighborhood

Mary Ipsen: There were a lot of children here. I mean there were *a lot* of children here. And my mother knew Mary Hurley's mother, and all the other mothers. They went to school, and they had mothers' clubs and stuff like that.

It was a lot easier for girls to meet guys years ago. Now you have to go to a tavern or someplace to meet somebody. We went to the roller rink and went to the Avalon and stuff like that. You know, it wasn't a tavern. We weren't tavern people.

William and Mary Ipsen: There was the Strand Theater over there, on 12th and Jackson. It was 10 cents and a lot of kids went there. They spent a lot of time there. On Saturdays you used to have the penny shows, too. That occupies you. For a penny, you can go and see a movie.

Kevin Mack: The Hollywood has had a lot of mixed bags of success. They used to show stuff on Friday and Saturday nights. It is really an awesome theater. It seats a lot of people and they have actually had a lot success in there with different music acts. Just in the last 7 years, I have seen a handful of big name musicians like Lyle Lovett, Johnny Lange, and different bands. It is a really nice venue for different music.

The Children's Museum is a really nice place. That's another thing that has been opened in the past year and a half. My family goes there about once every week.

We can go down to Houska Park. As far as recreation is concerned, this whole area is awesome. That is really why I wanted to stay here. The change in seasons and the different things you can do in the area. It is really awesome.

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: Another good thing that's happening in the neighborhood with education, Viterbo and the Boys and Girls Club of La Crosse are jointly going to be building this student recreation center. They plan to break ground now in spring of 2004. I think that's going to be really good because Viterbo students can work with the boys and girls in tutoring and recreational areas. It's also going to provide a place for the children of the neighborhood. So, that's really one of the future things that we can really look forward to in the neighborhood.

As a neighborhood group, one thing we're trying to figure out is where we could put a park. There is one, Houska Park. It is down by the riverfront. [We are working] on how can we make that safer and more pleasant for children and for adults, too. So, that's really about the only park that we have. There are little corner parks here and there, but they are very, very minimal.

I think if we really could [put another park in the neighborhood], it would be good to have another one. They're nice congregating places. Right now, probably the only playground equipment and stuff is at Lincoln School. I think that's about the only place that has that. The Lutheran School has a little bit over there, but that's primarily for their student body when they're in school.

The Y [YMCA] is on Cass Street and West Avenue.

Sister Jeanine Luger: Once in a while, there are functions [in the neighborhood]. There is a symphony at Viterbo next week Friday, which I plan to attend. There are band concerts performed at Riverside Park. They are very good. .

Travel in the Neighborhood

William Ipsen: The only ones in the neighborhood who had cars were the wealthy ones. The average people didn't have cars.

Joan Henthorn: Kids did things at home. If you [as a kid] were allowed to go some place, you walked or rode your bike.

We walked. My mom did not have a car until I was a junior in high school. So we walked a lot, not just my family. Kids walked to school or rode their bikes. There was not a lot of busing going on. The only time we got rides even all the way out to Central was when it was freezing cold. The mother of one of my friends who lived a couple blocks away had a car and she would take us so we wouldn't freeze.

Carol Petrowski: When I was little, going to Onalaska was kind of a big deal. I am not sure if that was just my family or everyone, but boy, if we were going to Onalaska, I thought that was really taking a trip. Now, of course, I drive to Onalaska everyday to go to work and my husband drives to Winona everyday to go to work. When I went to college in Winona, I stayed in the dorm. It was a major trip and now, Jim goes back and forth every day to work in Winona.

There was the city bus. We walked. This sounds like the old story of walking ten miles to school uphill in both directions, but it was twelve blocks, a full mile for me to walk from home to Holy Cross School. You just did it. Now Aquinas parking lot has all these cars in it. Hardly anyone drove a car to go to high school. I can't think of anybody who did that when I went to school. Kids still rode bikes and not that many people were dropped off in cars. It seemed like everyone walked and now I am not so sure that that is true any more.

John Sagen: The first time I ever went out to a dance, it was a spring formal at Aquinas. It was a record hop about 1958. The girls would ask the guys and that's how I got involved in it. I never went to too many dances or anything. The girls had on formal dresses and we had suit coats and ties on. That was sort of dominant in that era. It started to loosen up a little afterwards with a more casual dress. This was just a special dance. Friday night dances after a football game were casual and you come as you are. There were two couples and we ended up at Walt's Restaurant that evening for our supper meal. We had to call a taxicab from Aquinas to Walt's. The guy that I was with called his dad and his dad picked up the four of us and delivered us to our homes. What I was touching on is transportation was at a premium. People just didn't have a car. Young kids didn't have access to cars like they do now.

[REDACTED]

There are several schools in the Washburn Neighborhood including Lincoln Middle School, Aquinas High School, and Viterbo University. There were many memories of the different educational institutions in Washburn Neighborhood, from those who knew these places as children to those who knew them as adults.

405 South 7th

I was 8th grade teacher and principal of the Cathedral School when the "flood" of the 60's came up to 3rd Street. Eugene Fry asked the 8th grade students to assist in filling sandbags. They happily did this because they could validly skip school to assist. Yes, it was the spring of 1965.

—*Sister Margaret Heil*

St. Francis School of Nursing

In 1957 I graduated from St. Francis School of Nursing. Fifty-four of us joined the nursing force of the city. My sister was student who had one more year. This school provided most of the nurses for the city and many for the state from 1905-1970.

—*Sister Marie Kyle*

215 South 8th St.

I remember Washburn School downtown. My girlfriend lived on 215 8th St. South. When she went there, it was K-6. She started kindergarten in 1946. Her principal was Mr. Spears. She had Miss Ruisch for 6th grade and Mrs. Fritz taught penmanship to all her students. All she got subsidized was milk (white not chocolate). She went home for lunch. No one ate there because all moms stayed at home. Sometimes they went sledding in Washburn Park.

—*Anonymous*

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: I think all the schools here have just been pretty great. I think they [the kids] are getting good quality education here. I think some schools like Lincoln are aware of the issues with their students and are really trying to work with the family units. We have more of a multi-cultural neighborhood now so they're working with the diversity in the neighborhood. Viterbo has been outstanding in so many ways in their education and they have been recognized for it. Aquinas draws from all the private schools in the city, so they bring in students from about seven or eight different schools.

Holy Cross & Cathedral Schools

Carol Petrowski: When I grew up, La Crosse was a big city to me. I didn't know anything else and the boundaries of my life were pretty much West Avenue to the east, Cass Street to the south, and maybe Badger Street to the north. We didn't travel much. I stayed very close to home. If it was on the other side of Cass Street, it was a pretty far distance. I did go to grade school at Holy Cross, which is now where the Cathedral Grade School is on 13th and Ferry. That was about the only time I ventured that far from home.

St. James

John Sagen: We had a closed recess at St. James so you had to more or less have your recess inside the classroom. The nuns knew that I had to go over to my grandmother's house who lived across the alley and get her kindling wood and so they always let me. "You have to go over to grandma's house," they'd tell me. So I'd run over there and take care of everything. She always managed, before I slipped out the door, to give me a few cookies. So I'd come back to school eating cookies. Naturally the kids would say, "Where'd you get those cookies?" It was handy to have a grandmother that was within a hundred feet of the school.

Lincoln Middle School

I have been teaching at Lincoln since 1980. I have seen many changes here and I often marvel how Lincoln continues to grow and adapt in positive ways. There is a real sense of community here, a feeling of home and I believe that is communicated to staff and students alike.

—Connie Houser (SLD teacher)

As a long-term teacher at La Crosse Lincoln Middle School, one of the many points of pride that stands out to me is Lincoln's openness to diversity. It is a joy to work in a school where our whole community is represented and welcomed as it is at Lincoln.

—Barbara Draeger

Joan Henthorn: I taught at Lincoln thirty-one years, but I went to school there for second grade, fourth grade, seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Coming back as a teacher made for an interesting first year [for me] because there were many teachers there who I'd had as a student. It was difficult to call them by their first name. They were still Mr. or Mrs. I am the one person who could tell everybody how Lincoln had changed. There used to be a kindergarten room where the office is now. They still had kindergarten. It used to be a K – 8 school. When I went to school there in second and fourth grade, they still had some of those grades, but I was the start of the "Baby Boomers." They didn't know what to do with all of us. The schools were crowded.

Aquinas High School

Some 60 years ago I was sent to teach at Aquinas High School. I found it to be the gem of the neighborhood. Each morning hundreds of eager, responsive students would pour into the building. My assignment was to aid and challenge each student to excellence in his/her gifts, and to prepare them to go out and make a difference in the world as good citizens and Catholics. Time has proven that Aquinas students' response made them the neighborhood's gem. I treasure Aquinas.

—Sister Margaret Mary Conway

John Sagen: Aquinas was the only parochial high school in the area. All my friends were going there and the tuition wasn't outrageous at that time either. It wasn't high like it is now. It was very nominal.

They ran a special bus on the Northside to get the students to Aquinas. That was probably the most common way to get to school because families didn't have multiple cars like they have nowadays. You had one car and usually the father was using that at work. The first bus that came through was the school bus and the students were told to ride on the first bus because the second bus would be for the workers downtown.

I don't know if there was as much school spirit as there is now. I hung around with guys from Logan and some from Aquinas. We played ball together and did a lot of fishing and boating on Black River. There wasn't too much of the school spirit like there is now. It didn't bother us. We were there to do a job and that was to go to school.

There was a dress code at Aquinas. You couldn't wear blue jeans. The girls had to wear blue dresses and it had to be right to their knee. They could wear a special sweater, but it couldn't be these fancy sweaters, just like a plain rayon or cotton sweater and a white blouse. That was their uniform. It was all right. They never had any problem with dress code. If the nun didn't like the way that you were dressed, you were out the door and you came back dressed right. There was no argument about it, not like there is today. You never talked back and if you misbehaved, the nun grabbed you and shook you up a little bit. You had it coming. And if you complained to your mother or dad, your dad would probably make sure you got a shaking at home, too. That's about the way it was.

There wasn't as much organized sports at the high school level. They had the football and basketball. To my knowledge, there were no girls' sports. I think about the only thing girls could go out for would be cheerleading and pom pon. Other than that, they didn't have golf or tennis, and none of those sporting activities for the women. I don't think the boys ever had golf. We didn't have tennis to my knowledge. And soccer was something that they played in another world.

Viterbo University

In 1950 it was one building, 815 S. 9th, and the college was only Sisters and girls planning to become Sisters. The first lay girls came shortly after. The faculty lived on 5th floor and taught classes on all the other floors.

--Anonymous

I came to Viterbo University to teach in 1945. At that time Murphy Center was the only building on campus. Since that time, I have watched and have been part of its growth from one building to ten magnificent buildings. Certainly, this part of La Crosse has been enhanced by this beautiful campus.

--Sister Marie, Professor Emeritus, Viterbo University

In the past few years, there have been many visual changes on and surrounding the Viterbo Campus. One significant change would be the campus name change. I graduated from Viterbo College and now work at Viterbo University.

—Deb


Father Tom O'Neill: In the 1870-something, I'd have to check the exact year; the Franciscan Sisters came from Jefferson, Wisconsin to La Crosse at the invitation of the Bishop of La Crosse. This was a new diocese then. They would come here to get their sisters ready to go out to little parishes around Wisconsin in order to teach religion. They came to the piece of property where St. Rose Convent is. A fellow by the name of Gerleman had purchased it for the sisters to come and establish themselves on that property. They eventually built that property the chapel and the convent there with the idea that that would be the school where they would teach the sisters. They had their classrooms and classes over in St. Rose Convent. That long extension that runs along Market Street is actually the classroom section of that building.

In those days, all educational institutions in the state of Wisconsin were called normal schools. So they started that, and they had St. Rose Normal School for the nuns who went out and taught. In about 1949, their numbers were growing. There were also other women interested in getting an education and being teachers and nurses. So they built the Murphy Center. This was the lone college building of what was eventually named Viterbo.

There's a city in Italy, north of Rome, called Viterbo. In the era just after when Francis of Assisi lived, there was a woman there. She wanted to become a Franciscan Sister and she became a historical figure in the city of Viterbo. Her first name was Rose. So when the Franciscan Sisters came from Jefferson, they wanted to name their convent after a Franciscan Saint because they were Franciscans. They chose Rose of Viterbo as their patron. And they gave that convent the name, St. Rose. When they moved over here and established this building, they needed to have a name for it as a college. They didn't want to call it St. Rose because they had St. Rose Convent—it would be too confusing. The story goes that they had a card game at night after supper and the sisters said whoever won the hand could name the school. So the sister that won the hand said, "We'll call it Viterbo." So then it became Viterbo College. They opened it up to women because it was largely women who wanted to be teachers and nurses.

The nuns actually lived on the fifth floor up here. There's a tunnel that connects this building to St. Rose Convent so they could go over there. Some women started coming here to school. Then they built the Marian Hall as a residence and cafeteria. From there, it developed. Our first nursing school was called St. Anne's. The nurses lived and went to school over there. In about 1970, it went co-ed. Because the government had considered us a comprehensive university, we were designated as a university by the federal government in 2000. We changed over from college to university in the year 2000.

Kevin Mack: The university-college level seems to be really involved in the community, trying to reach out. I think the university has done a nice job of reaching out to the community, saying we are part of the community and we want to be good citizens.



One of the many characteristics that defines Washburn Neighborhood is the diversity in religion and how the many institutions of faith work with the residents of the neighborhood to create a vibrant, cohesive place in which to live and worship. As a visitor walks through the neighborhood, he can see the diversity in faith from the Wesley United Methodist Church on King Street, Our Saviors Lutheran Church on Division, the Bible Baptist on 7th Street, to the First Church of Christian Science at King and West Avenue. These are just a few of the places of worship in the neighborhood. The memories that follow include some others as well.

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: As a whole, the city of La Crosse is very faith-based. And right here in the neighborhood, we are Roman Catholic. We used to have St. Wenceslaus Parish, which was right across the street. Then that parish closed and the church actually became the chapel for Viterbo. They're using the facility and the school has become the School of Nursing. Then, on the corner of Market and 9th, we have the UCC church – United Church of Christ. As you go down West Avenue, there's the Lutheran Church. There's another one over on Division, I'm not sure of the denomination.

Before 1965 when the Roman Catholic Church had the second Vatican Council, there wasn't the interchange that we have now. It was, more or less, that we each did our own thing. I remember growing up as a kid; we had a Presbyterian Church in town. You didn't go to that Presbyterian Church; you went to your own church. That has changed now. I think that we respect each other's religion and beliefs and I think we're much more open to each other now than we have been the past, and that's a good – it's a very good thing.

Father Tom O'Neill: So I know people who live around here who are Catholic and go to the Cathedral. Some people who live on this side go to Holy Trinity. We also have a lot of churches in the neighborhood. We have two Lutheran churches right up there on West Avenue. We have the Presbyterian Church on West Avenue. We have a Baptist church. We have a couple of others in the neighborhood. When I'm tooling around on Sunday morning going from one place to another, I see people heading to church.

William Ipsen: In the summertime, they'd leave the doors open in the church. I had a golden retriever, a big dog, for hunting. He knew that Shirley [William's daughter] went there. So in the mornings, he'd walk over there looking for her. He'd go right into church. He'd walk right up the aisle and sit with her. She tried to get him out of there and he wouldn't go! She'd come home mortified! All the kids knew the dog. Oh, boy, she used to get so mad!

We've been involved with the Good Neighborhood Days. We have it here [Viterbo]. We put up the big tent and invite the neighbors in for an evening barbeque, cookout, games, and that sort of thing. I've been involved with and been part of the organization for Good Neighbor Day where we deliver bread to the neighborhood on St. Francis Day. We've been kind of partnering with

Chileda, St. Francis, with the sisters at St. Rose, Viterbo, and Aquinas to be good neighbors, and to be consciously aware of doing that. And we have a neighborhood clean-up day.

We're aware that we have two schools in our neighborhood so we send our education students over to work at both the middle school and the elementary school. Our students volunteer there. They'll do basketball and soccer clinics with the kids. Teachers will call up and ask if we have some students who can help chaperone for some field trips, so we get students to go over and do that. One time they were going to put some new playground equipment together and wanted to know if we had some students who could help put it together. We went over there and did that.

We've entered into a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club to build onto our gymnasium. So we'll have a facility that we share with Boys and Girls Club. Our students will help out with some of the programming and the kids will come in. There'll be three gymnasiums, a running track, and a weight room. It's kind of unique because there's no other neighborhood Boys and Girls Club in the country that is affiliated in such a close way with a university.

St. Rose Convent

One of my fondest memories was my tour of St. Rose Convent. The beauty of all the angels and how well-kept the convent is was unbelievable. The shades in the stain glass windows to the vibrant colors. All the handcrafted work is unbelievable. The church is an art masterpiece in its self.

—Blaine

When I entered St. Rose Convent in 1934, Viterbo University consisted of a few rooms on the first floor of St. Rose and the music department was in the 9th Street side of first floor. The block where Murphy Center is now had some houses and a large area where we played ball after we cleared out all the sand burrs. Each summer when we returned in late August, we'd clear out the summer growth of sand burrs again.

—Sister Beatrice

Father Tom O'Neill: St. Rose is now a retirement center for their sisters. There are about 100 retired sisters who live in that building. They're not infirm, just retired.

Franciscan Spirituality Center

In 1985, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration established a Spirituality Center in the east wing of St. Rose Convent open to people of all denominations. The purpose of the Center is to provide a space for anyone seeking a space for prayer, meetings, or team renewal. The staff at the Center offers spiritual guidance, retreats and workshops. Many businesses have found it as quiet place for staff meetings.

—Sister Leona Brugman

St. Francis Hospital

The Beginning of St. Francis Hospital. In 1883, a doctor asked Mother Ludovica for nurses. She said the community had none. He said, "Give me two sisters and I will train them." This was the beginning of St. Francis Hospital.

—Sister Norene

San Domiano

St. Wenceslaus, now San Domiano, the university church, was a bustling parish in 1950. The building to the south was St. Wencel's grade school. I did my practice teaching of one week observing and one week teaching the 6th grade here. Sister Rose Rita was the classroom teacher and her encouragement formed me into a teacher. That school building is the new Brophy Center for nursing classes.

—Anonymous

Father Tom O'Neill: In 1969, St. Wenceslaus Church was a parish church. It was built as a Bohemian church. It closed in 1974. It stayed empty until 1979, when the college [Viterbo College] took it over and turned it into the college church. St. Wenceslaus is now San Domiano Chapel on the Viterbo University property.

Changes

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: Holy Cross was the Irish one [school] and St. Mary's was the German one. Both of those have closed. Some [students] have gone to Cathedral now. Part of that closure was because of the shift in neighborhood population, too. There were fewer children. Each group had their own school at that time. And then they built one school on Ferry and 13th, Cathedral School. So they joined the students from St. Wenceslaus and Holy Cross, St. Mary's and then the Cathedral. They all attended one school. Holy Trinity students now also attend Cathedral School.

Carol Petrowski: When I was growing up, churches were divided more by nationality. We went to Holy Cross because it was predominantly Polish even though the Cathedral was right there close to us. It was German. Now I don't think it is at all divided like that. We belong to the Cathedral now. Well, Holy Cross was sort of absorbed into the Cathedral when it went away. I was not the last graduating class from Holy Cross in 1960.

I think the Cathedral serves a lot of people in the Washburn group. And I think it is a good unifying force. There are certainly people at the Cathedral from all over, not just Washburn, but I suspect that most Catholics, practicing Catholics in the Washburn area do go to the Cathedral.

[REDACTED]

The diversity of the Washburn Neighborhood is evident in variety of businesses and workplaces in the neighborhood. Businesses range from large organizations like Eversole Motors, Kwik Trip, and Franciscan Skemp Medical Center to small businesses like Dave's Guitar Shop, Pizza Doctors, and Barge Chiropractic Center. The memories of other businesses in the neighborhood that follow also reflect this diversity.

Everyday Living and Shopping in the Neighborhood

Houghton's

Donald Meinert, a.k.a. "Chick", lived over the bar. Chick's father's owned the property. The back room was used to roll cigars at night.

---"Randolph"

Recovery Room

Ringside Bar owned by George Marcus. Marcus owned the bar for 40 years. George was a boxer and trained boxers. Mickey Zuelke was a boxer trained by George. Bruce Samones bought the bar in the early 80s.

---John

Father Tom O'Neill: So the closest tavern is Houghton's over here, or Stix, and they're fine. Houghton's is a great place for students to go to eat. And then the Recovery Room is down there, that's good too.

Carol Petrowski: The Lunch Encounter facility has been around for a long time. I know that somewhere during the years that I lived in California it was a vegetarian restaurant. I remember reading somewhere that John Denver ate there once and I thought, how neat! I think it was a bakery when I was growing up.

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: There were small businesses here in the area. There was a donut shop on the corner of Market and 9th. Of course, everyone likes donuts, so you used to stop there in the morning for their donuts. I believe that now has moved down to Mr. D's. There was a little locksmith down on the corner of about 6th and Market. They moved downtown to a different location. There used to be a funeral home over on 7th and Winnebago, I think it was the Schumacher Funeral Home, which is now on West Avenue.

Carol Petrowski: Some local changes are just going along with the times rather than the place. Growing up, I remember corner grocery stores. We had a grocery store just across the street. Two houses up there was just a tiny little one-room place where we bought a lot of our things.

There were other little grocery stores in the neighborhood. There were taverns every couple of blocks. It seems like they have all sort of gone away now. Perhaps that is not a bad thing, but it is change.

I see that La Crosse keeps up with other cities. We have got our Wal-Marts and our big chain stores, but I kind of miss how it was growing up. I could walk downtown and go to Doerflingers' and Barons.' Little drugstores are not there. It was all very personal and very nice and it is kind of a shame to see it not be that way, but again it is just progress.

There were smaller, commercial buildings. There were little shoe stores. We had two shoe repair places within just a couple of blocks of where I lived and it was wonderful. I can still remember the smell of all the stuff. I was very nostalgic just to think about it. There was a little upholstery shop. We could pretty much get everything we needed. We were obviously so close to downtown that all of our shopping was done there. Of course, downtown closed up at 5 o'clock on Friday night so you got all your shopping done before 5 or you went on Saturday.

Stanley Thomas: They [businesses] were probably being established in the forties and fifties. After about my first ten years at the brewery, they [the brewery] were buying up some of the property, 2 or 3 taverns that they bought up for their expansion. Those businesses were gone. The college took out some businesses on Market Street. Viterbo did that also for their dormitory. Most of the neighborhood businesses disappeared due to the expansion of the brewery, Viterbo, the hospital, and clinic.

There was a little restaurant that stood on the corner of 11th and Market Street on the northeast corner. It is now a parking lot. It has been gone for some 20 years. I can't tell you the name it had. I used to stop every morning on my way to the brewery. They opened at 5:30 in the morning and you could get a good breakfast every morning. I remember the couple that owned the business and ran it.

Kevin Mack: I think that if anything, there isn't so much of a loss [of businesses], as there's been a gain. It seems like it is one success after another in the last seven years. A lot of the industrial business is moving out. It is a natural process. The downtown is what they have had for the last century or so. In the country for the last century or fifty years there has been a decline in population and just kind of neglect and decay. And now we are seeing the beginning of the renaissance of stuff coming back now, like rebirth in people valuing this type of neighborhood instead of continuing to neglect it like we have in the past century.

Working in the Neighborhood

John Sagen: I guess space heaters were common in those days or the rubbish burners in the kitchen where you burn coal and wood. That was one of the jobs I always had when I was younger was to make sure that there's kindling wood and coal. I would bring in the fuel oil for the space heater. In fact, I used to do that for my grandmother. Different people would hire me

to do that and so that gave me a few dollars of spending money. My dad worked at the AutoLite and my uncle was the head shipper so they would have these crates. He would send over a whole truckload of crates and that would be a job for us to knock these crates apart and stack all of the kindling wood.

La Crosse Public Library

The fun of moving and shifting library collections in the early '80s. Passing book after book to co-workers and beating Jim White, our library director, at ping-pong during a work break. Also Bob Kachel coming to work from that move in a prom dress.

---Mary D.

While working at the library, one of our patrons collapsed and was unresponsive from an apparent heart attack. I administered CPR for about 10 minutes and helped save his life. His entire family came in a few days later and thanked me.

---Bill Peterson

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: I think this is primarily a residential neighborhood so they [the residents] tend to work. I would say some of them more in service industries or in lower-paid jobs. I'm not sure that we have a lot of that are in key management positions. There probably are a few in the neighborhood, but that would say something, too, about the level of income that we have in the neighborhood. Many individuals work at Viterbo or at Franciscan Skemp in various areas as nurses or teachers. There probably are some professionals living in the neighborhood. There is also a concentration of students here, too. A lot of them are just trying to get through college and are just doing some part time work to help them get through their schooling.

Heileman's Brewery

John Sagen: They were going to hire some full-time people. And I thought, well, it isn't too bad down here. I sort of liked it and I'd be making \$2.62 an hour. So I decided to stay here and work for a year and then go back to school. Well, I went home that Friday night after I was told to report on Monday and that I'd be a full-time employee with all the benefits. I remember telling my dad, I said, "I'm going to go out tonight and I'm going to look at new cars. I'm going to buy a new car." That was when '63s were just coming out. He said, "Are you sure you can afford a new car?" And I said, "Yep, I'm going to be making two dollars and sixty some cents an hour." And he said, "Wow, I guess you can afford a new car." So...I eventually did. And I was the first one in the family to have a car and I ended up taking them around to different places.

First, I was on a cleaning crew and I was working nights. Then as business expanded, I gained a little seniority and got on days. I worked in the bottle house on miscellaneous. I was a filler operator, filling the empty bottles with beer. Well, one year there was a clause in the contract saying that the forty-first guy has to go over in the cellars and work. And, I wasn't too happy

about that, but now that I look back, it was the best move I ever made. I really enjoyed working over there in, dealing with beers' character. I've always enjoyed the people down there. There's a sort of special camaraderie. I guess I knew how to do every job.

There was no problem with overtime. If you wanted to work it, it was there. When I first started, it was nine and a half hours a day, six days a week. On Sunday, you'd only have to work eight hours cleaning and getting ready for the following week. When Strohs bought out the place back about 1992, they just couldn't make enough beer and we were just going seven days a week. They had to have overtime sheets; they had on-shift rotation and off-shift rotation. They tried to keep overtime divided evenly, unlike a lot of unions where they have what they call a hog board. The oldest guys work every time. You start at the top every time and if the hogs on top all wanted to work, the younger guys don't get the work. We rotated. So we had an on-shift and an off-shift. Everybody got equal crack at it.

Of course, Heileman's was involved in the bakery business. They had Erickson Bakeries. They expanded into different bakeries that they bought out and brought a lot of production here. Eventually they ended up selling that off.

And Heileman's was based on blue-collar workers. They sold an enormous amount of beer around the Chicago area and through Indiana. Now you call it the Rust Belt because most of those industries have disappeared: the heavy duty, the foundries, steel business in that area, etc. You know the guys would get together after working in a real hot foundry and want a couple of cold glasses of beer. Heileman's pretty well had that sewed up. I guess the demographics changed over the years and that's what happens. You know, it always affects some business somewhere along the line.

They [Heileman's] always had get-togethers and picnics. They would have a big cookout, all the beer you could drink. And of course, there were always some characters there that couldn't get enough beer and couldn't get enough food. And I don't know, some of the times they'd have more food than you could shake a stick at, but when it came time to serve, it was all gone. We had Christmas parties. Every year, the brewery would give us a turkey at Thanksgiving time. And we always had a summer picnic. That was a lot of fun.

I remember Heileman's always got involved in the fair by purchasing the blue ribbon pig or some other animal. In fact one year, they bought the champion pig. They didn't know where to put it so they put it down at the brewery. They put a snow fence right across from the main entry of the brewery on Third Street. That only lasted about a week because after guys would come out on third shift, they'd have some courage and want to wrestle with the pig. They'd wrestle with it and pull the ears or something and then the thing would squeal. Pretty soon the neighbors started complaining. It was six o'clock in the morning and they could hear this pig squealing. The guys had naturally had a few beers before they went home. It was all in good fun, but not for the pig and not for the neighbors.

I think generally there was a good relationship between the brewery and the people that lived around that area. I know a lot of us guys, we'd walk down the alley and talk to one old gentleman. He was always out there every morning chopping wood. He lived the old way. He

must have been in his eighties. He'd put out a little cup of grain in the morning. The pigeons would come and eat around him. It was sort of interesting. Frank was his name. His house was eventually purchased and tore down. It was an old brick house. I remember when they had the auction there.

Mary Ipsen: I worked at the rubber mills too, but you stunk so when you came home. Otherwise it wasn't a bad place to work. And it was only two blocks. I'd walk there.

William Ipsen: I worked at the Northern Engraving, I don't know how many years, but... never could save five cents. So, I told everyone down there, "I quit," and I did something else. So then I worked two jobs. She [Mary Ipsen] used to pack me two lunches. I told her I was trying to learn the business. So we lived on one check and we saved the other one. Then I went into business. And after that, I don't think we ever had any financial problems. I owned the tent and awning shop.

John Sagen: While I was going to school, I worked at Art's Gift Shop – Art's Dairyland it was first called. That's on the corner of Twelfth and State Street, right across from the existing Mister D's Donuts. And, I did a little bit of everything there: unpacked the china that came in, made sundaes, did dishes, mopped the floors, shoveled the sidewalk – you name it, I did it.

Joan Henthorn: In the 1950s, I don't recall anyone in that neighborhood having a college degree especially in a working class neighborhood [like Washburn Neighborhood]. I think that the adults were all high school graduates. Many worked at some factory job. My mother worked at Saint Francis in an office doing secretarial type work. The people who owned the house in which we lived worked. The mother didn't work for a period of time, but then she started to work at Lutheran doing secretarial work. Her husband was the projectionist at the Hollywood Theater.

[REDACTED]

In addition to other historic structures in Washburn Neighborhood, the 10th and Cass Street Neighborhood Historic District is representative of the historical prominence of the neighborhood. Although some of the more historic buildings in the community have been lost, there was a general consensus among the interviewees that there is now a concerted effort in the community to improve and protect the historic structures in the Washburn Neighborhood.

When I first came to Aquinas H.S. in 1950, there were two private homes on the property between Cass Street & West Avenue. On the north lawn on Cass, directly behind the boiler room, was a yellow house with a steeple, in which a few Irish nuns lived. They had been brought over from Ireland by Bishop Treacy, and helped out in Catholic activities in La Crosse. The second home at the NW corner of Cass and West Avenue. It was a very large green two-story home and was the residence of the sister of Mrs. Elliot. This lady died around 1951-1952, and the house was torn down, and the grounds used for athletic practices. The Loretto House (yellow house) was also torn down, but someone bought the steeple. Now the New Aquinas Middle School has been extended over the areas where these two homes were located. This includes a parking area for faculty and visitors.

---Sister Lucille Kleinheinz

St. Frances Hospital

The property between the old St. Anne's building and the new Nurses Home was the old medical building, which was cleaned up in 1934 by the postulants of St. Rose and made hospitable for the aspirants and postulants to live in during the summer. Then it was used for the Aquinas sisters (about 30) to live in. It was connected to St. Frances by the overhead bridge. I lived there with the Aquinas sister in 1940-41. Later the sisters lived in the old Bishop home on 11th and Cass and later the old Silnone Hall.

---Sister Marie

Sister Ladonna Kassmeyer: Well, many of the homes are built prior to, I believe, 1940. There are a lot of homes now that are leased or rented and landowners or homeowners are not living right in the neighborhood in their own home. I think sometimes homes haven't been kept up as well as if the landlord was living here and taking care of the property.

The homes are smaller and adequate, but I think for the most part, probably need some updating for electrical codes and with heating and probably some insulation. I know at one point I lived in one on 7th Street and you could feel the breeze coming in the window during winter. We put plastic up to keep drafts out. Even as you drive through the neighborhood, you can see that many of the homes do need some updating and some are now being updated. We're trying to get more home ownership back into the neighborhood. Part of it may be, too, because we're near a university and it might be that landlords opted to rent the homes to students. Some students take good care and some not quite as good care of the property. Hopefully, we have good renters.

We do have some beautiful homes in the area. I'm glad to see a lot of people are really restoring the homes to some of their original beauty. I think that that's a really good thing that's happening in the neighborhood.

In this neighborhood, we had Bakalars Sausage over on Winnebago Street, but they moved when Viterbo bought that building. There were a couple of homes that we did take down, but they were not worth updating. It would be cheaper to take them down and rebuild. Actually we Franciscan Sisters have restored one [house] on Cameron Avenue, which is right by Aquinas High School. We've restored that to some of its original beauty, and it's really lovely. We kept as much of the wood as we could because being a lumber town, many of those homes have beautiful wood floors or woodwork. It's really lovely

Carol Petrowski: When I grew up people stayed put and you knew that was the old Jones' house. Houses were known by the name of the people who lived there for generations. That was completely out the window when I moved to Los Angeles. Everybody moved around. I didn't know much about apartments. I thought everyone lived in a house. Now that I am back again, there is certainly a lot of students and student housing. And that has changed from when I was growing up. I don't think I had been in very many apartment buildings when I was growing up. There must have been some, but not right where I lived and as I told you, we didn't travel very far.

I like the fact that I can walk to downtown. I like to walk. I like to go down to the river or just downtown or wherever. I like the houses here. I like a lot of modern things. I certainly like updated plumbing and electrical, but I like the older houses. I really like this house, for example, even though we have done a lot to make it more comfortable. This is the kind of house I like. When you go into new housing tracts, everything is cookie-cutter the same. I like the diversity here of architecture, of the people.

Father Tom O'Neill: If you just look at the physical place, there's been lots of change. We've built the new Reinhart Center, which is on the corner there now. We built Rose Terrace, the student residence. We put a new entrance on the Fine Arts Center and made the entrance on Jackson Street. We built a new physical plant building over there. We've done a lot of upgrading of the buildings, air-conditioning them, putting new roofs on, or things you don't normally see if you look around. It just kind of beautified the campus.

When I first came here, you just kind of drove through the streets and there were 2 or 3 buildings. Now it's more of a campus. I think it's an attractive place for the city and this part of town to have in it.

I think there's a lot of pride here for this old neighborhood. It's an old part of town. People take pride in their property and keep it fixed up.

Joan Henthorn: There is an influx of students also. I think that a lot of the properties must have become rental properties now. I have walked in that area a lot, and a lot is the same but a lot is different. There are homes that are not as well kept as they used to be. People were very proud of their homes. It was a very well kept neighborhood, and in comparison to other cities, I think it still is a pretty decent neighborhood.

I have noticed that people have started fixing up some of the bigger homes. I love seeing that because I love the big old homes. I have lived in several different apartments in the big old homes and love that. So I am happy to see that.

Kevin Mack: Three or four years ago, the city council enacted the law that people cannot tear down buildings for parking. Over the past few years, we have had mixed success in trying to save them. Some not so successful; across from Dahl Ford, the Mitchell Brewery was a magnificent building that was battled over for many years. It came down. There was a house right next to the Kind Theater, stone, unique, one of a kind building. It was basically torn down in the middle of the night and was gone forever. There is just parking there now. That was a kind of the catalyst for saying we have to do something. Over the past 50 years, half this town has been wiped out. I think we are starting to see the end of that tragedy, and the beginning of reclaiming these areas and improving them.

Sister Jeanine Luger: Some of the houses on Madison and on Cameron are some very attractive houses. Some are in the process of being renovated. They are beautifully painted and have turned out very, very nice. I appreciate the work that these owners have done with their houses.

There is a very nice, very small, but well positioned park or green area. It is across the alley from Becker Plaza. It is very attractive and very neat. It's on 7th. It is only about a half a block, but it is very attractive. I would like to see more parks, but I do not want to see any of the houses torn down to do it.

[REDACTED]

This final section includes some memories of historical events that interviewees recalled; demonstrating that even the events that seem so far removed from Washburn Neighborhood could still touch the lives of the people who lived here.

The Depression

William Ipsen: I remember when all the banks went broke. The armored cars came and got the money out of these banks around here. I was a kid selling papers. People were angry because they couldn't get their money. My friend and I were there. We said, "Why are they taking that money out of these banks? Bags of it!" We thought, "Why won't they give the people their money?" But I suppose they were frozen. After that, there were soup lines downtown, where you could stand by the hotel and get in line a block long to get a bowl of soup and a couple slices of bread. Things were tough. 1929 was when the heart of the crash was. I was 11 years old so I remember much of it. Everyday you'd read in the paper that somebody jumped out of a window in New York and killed himself or herself because they lost all their money. Her [Mary Ipsen] uncle was a very, very wealthy man, and he lost everything they had. A lot of people lost everything they had. That was a tough time.

The War

William and Mary Ipsen: The war affected everything. Everything! You couldn't get enough groceries, sugar, coffee, or anything else. Everybody drank black coffee without sugar because you couldn't get sugar, if you could even get coffee. Everything was hard to get those days. Then when they started to retool everything... man, oh man, people *really* got jobs then.

The Berlin Crisis

John Sagen: There was the Berlin Crisis. It ended up that I got to a point where I was either going to be drafted or most of the guys were signing up for the National Guard. So they said why don't you try up at the National Guard Armory and see if you can't get signed up there. So I did. I signed up in 1964. I was in the Guards until 1970. I was activated to go to Madison for the riots down there after the bombing at Bascom Hill. That was quite an experience in itself. We slept in the rotunda. That was more or less our headquarters. We were down there for the riots around two weeks.

Once I was activated in 1965 for the big flood of '65. We built earthen dams around the Northside all the way up to Onalaska and across the causeway. We built a big dam right across the middle of the causeway. So in order to get down to the South Side, you had to go over to Highway 16. That's how you got downtown. Yes, because I remember driving over Lang Drive with one of these Deuce and half army trucks and I was probably in a good foot and half of water.