

A Report On Some Historic Structures in the Downtown Area
La Crosse, Wisconsin

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This report discusses some of the existing buildings in the downtown area that have historical or architectural importance. It is not a complete list of all such structures, but should include most of the early buildings that remain. The original building name is given first. Modern names are enclosed (). Dates refer to original construction and later additions.

Buildings having an * are considered by the author to have exceptional merit and excellent restoration potential.

Although not directly a part of the commercial buildings of the downtown area, three other structures should be considered in any discussion of historic architecture.

Pump House--119 King--1880, c. 1890 -- John A. Cole, Civil Engineer

This Romanesque Revival building is the last public building in that style remaining in the city. It was begun about 1880 but a major rebuilding about 1890 resulted in the present appearance. Its use as a pumping station and its stylistic uniqueness make it a significant local building.

Burnett House--410 S. Third--1851, 1876

Perhaps the oldest house remaining on its original location, this frame house is unusual to find in the downtown area. The side wings were added in 1876 and a brick rear was put on at still a later date.

* Mons Anderson House--410 Cass--1854-1878

Andrew Shepard built the east wing of the present house in 1854. It was purchased in 1864 by Mons Anderson and in 1878 he added the tower, west wing, rear ballroom and made various changes. The best Italianate revival stone house in the area, this historic building is of utmost importance to the history of the city. Its excellent proportions and detail proclaim the status of the owner. Elaborate mantles once surrounded the interior fireplaces and decorative tile was used in several places.

PEARL STREET

- * Building -- 201 Pearl at Second, NE c. 1880

An exceptional combination of brick, stone, cast-iron, and sheet metal. More elaborate than its earlier neighbors to the east, the cornice and iron front remain relatively unchanged.

Schwarz Building (Metamorphosis) - 205-207-209 Pearl--1874-1887

The eastern three bays of this building were constructed originally as a two story building similar to the Voegle Block. In 1887 this building was raised to three stories and the western nine bays were added. This addition accounts for the irregular window arrangement on the upper floors. Originally used as a furniture store, it was later the location of various hotels.

- * Voegle Block (T J's)--211-213-215 Pearl--1874, 1868, 1866

The building at 215 Pearl is the oldest known brick commercial structure in the city. The three buildings are typical of the modest commercial establishments once common in the area. Such stores usually had apartments on the second story and occasionally they were rooming houses.

Kroner Building -- 219-221 Pearl -- 1868-71

These early two story buildings usually had cast iron fronts added at a later date. The simple two story buildings could be extended as the need arose.

Esperson Block 223-225-227 Pearl -- 1866-68

Like the Voegle Block, this series of early buildings are significant examples of the early structures. The present building seems to be several structures combined.

(Shepards Voice & Deannas) -- 300-302 Pearl c. 1875

This two story building has excellent stone window heads. The hanging brick arches beneath the cornice are copied from Romanesque buildings which links this structure with the revival of that style.

John Walters Bldg. (Casino Bar) 304 Pearl--1878, c. 1940

An interesting but not exceptional early building had its ground floor remodeled into the city's best remaining example of a 30's Modern bar. Although the two styles are visually quite different, both represent their eras and this is one addition that should remain as it is.

(Oxford Pub) -- 317 Pearl

The large arch on the second story is unusual and in combination with the stone trim (now painted) it shows the influence of the Romanesque Revival on smaller buildings.

PEARL STREET (continued)

(Kroner's Hardware) -- 319-321 Pearl -- c. 1878

This three story building is an example of the middle sized commercial building built in the late 1870's. The upper part of the cornice has been removed.

J. Burgermeister Bldg. (Arenz Shoe Co.) -- 323-325 Pearl --1885

This building contained two stores on the ground floor with a center stair leading to upper apartments. The cornice still defines the parts of the building.

* Gund Bldg. -- 327 Pearl -- c1885

Now incorporated into the Arenz Shoe Co., this building has an exceptional two story oriel window. The octagonal shape and the cast-iron colonettes around the window link this building to the continued interest in the Gothic revival.

MAIN STREET

* Healey's Block (Yahr-Lang Drugs) Main at Second SE - 1879 and later

This two story building with a three story section on the west end is actually several different buildings that were built together at an early date. It is remembered as the offices of Dr. Frank Powell, known as White Beaver, an early doctor who used medicines based on formulas given him by the Indians of the region. This building has notable metal window heads and cornices as well as unusual brickwork. The lower floors retain the cast iron columns, probably produced at the local foundry of John Torrance.

* Pffiffner's Block -- 218 Main -- 1868, 1873, 1875

The western three bays were built in 1868, another four bays were added in 1873, and the eastern four bays were built in 1875. The cornice line of the first floor is maintained across all three structures although the roof line changes between buildings. The elaborate brick work reflects the increasing prosperity of the city. The lower floors remain relatively unchanged from their appearance in the late 1870's.

Rodolf's Block (Rowley's Office Supply)--Main and Third SW--1870, 1878, 1970

A 24 x 80 ft. three story building was first constructed. A similar sized addition was made in 1878 on the west side, and a slightly larger unit was again added on the west in 1878. The building has recently been covered with a modern exterior, but the original upper floors remain behind this covering.

MAIN STREET (continued)

- * Post Office Block--Main and Third NE -- 1871, 1886--Charles J. Ross, architect

The western six bays were constructed first and housed the city post office until the completion of the Customs House and Post Office at Fourth and State in 1888. In 1886, the eastern seven bays were added to the building and carefully matched with the older decoration. The ongoing rejuvenation of this building is making it one of the handsomest in the city.

- * Bank Building--Main and Fourth SE--1881--C.F. Struck, Architect

Designed in the Venetian Gothic style, this building is one of the most distinctive commercial structures in the city, and is located on what was once the most prestigious site in the city.

Old State Bank Bldg. (La Crosse Trust Co) -- 311 Main -- 1888, c 1960

Although some parts of the building were altered in the remodeling, this building is a good example of the continued use of an older structure. Decorative terra-cotta and bright red brick clearly show that our present day view of old buildings as being dingy is a result of accumulated dirt rather than their original appearance.

Batavian Bank Bldg.--319 Main--1886, c 1960-- S.S. Beaman, architect

The Romanesque Revival style creates a feeling of massiveness and strength that is advantageous to a bank. The Chicago architect chose a Mediterranean style of decoration that is uncommon in smaller cities. The carved stone decoration on the upper floors is similar to that which originally graced the street level.

Doerflinger Department Store--Main at Fourth SE--1903--Schick and Roth, architect

Replacing the Park Store which burned in a devastating fire, this was the first of the modern commercial structures in the city. Its simple shapes and recessed wall surfaces are typical of the Chicago style of building.

McMillan Bldg.--Main at Fourth NE--1887--c. 1965

This Romanesque Revival structure is one of the largest in the city. Its distinctive appearance is in keeping with the character of its original owner, Alexander McMillan. The massive center arch has been covered by a new front, but the remainder of the building retains its original appearance.

First City Hall--409-423 Main--1868, 1890, 1917--W. Nichols, Architect

Kauma's and Jeffrey's stores are located in the shell of the first City Hall. The ground floor contained the Fire Station, city offices were on the second floor, an observation tower was on the roof, and a tall hose drying tower stood behind the building. The interior has been completely remodeled, both towers have been removed, a new front was added about 1917, and several brick additions were made on the rear. The stone wall that faces the alley is the only original portion visible today from the outside.

SECOND STREET

Michel Bldg. -- 111 S. Second -- 1887

Built for C. & J. Michel five years before their building at 113 S. Third, this simple two story brick building housed a "Sample Room" shortly after its construction, and in later years it had various occupants.

* Pamperin Cigar Co. -- 113 S-Second--c.1880

This building is the home of La Crosse's most famous cigar maker and since its restoration it continues to serve its owner. The cast iron front and elaborate window heads are distinctive early examples of these forms.

THIRD STREET

(Corner Inn) Third at Vine--NW c. 1870

The three arches across the front are typical of many buildings that once existed along Second and Front. The exact construction date of this building is not yet known, but it certainly will be early. The corner entrance is similar to many found in La Crosse.

* P. Schintgen Bldg.--225-227 N. Third -- c.1880

The distinctive wide arch on the ground floor provides easy access to the two stores and the upper floor apartments. The oriel window on the second floor was used on several buildings in the city, but few examples remain.

* W.E. Potter Bldg. (D.A. Club)--Third at State SW -- 1885

The window heads on this building are similar to those at 120 S. Third and were probably produced locally, perhaps by the Montague Steam Marble Works. The sheet metal cornice has rusted but still remains one of the most elaborate in town, especially for a two story building. The ground floor has been altered somewhat.

* Meason Bldg. (State Room) 126 1/2-128 South Third -- 1883

This two story brick building has side stairs to the upper apartments, but the most unusual feature is the use of cast iron to imitate stone piers to support the decorated castiron lintel. The carved window heads makes this one of the most elaborate small buildings in the city.

(Chop House) -- 122 N. Third

The stone front of this building is very unusual for La Crosse and should be researched further.

THIRD STREET (continued)

Mosher's Block--117 N. Third--1870

This two story building had a notable cornice and unusual second floor windows, but a recent application of stucco has covered the distinctive elements.

(Bicha & La Crosse Glove) -- 113-115 N. Third -- c. 1875, c. 1935

The lower floors of these two buildings were modernized in the 1930's, but the original building remains intact beneath the alterations.

Building--107-109-111 N. Third--c. 1870

Although complete information is not yet available on these three buildings, they show characteristics typical of the early years of La Crosse. The fronts of 107 and 111 remain relatively unchanged.

W.E.P. Bldg. -- 107-109 S. Third (Coney Island and Blue Tiger) -- c.1880

This seven bay building has a central stair between two stores. A decorative stone band extends across the front at the level of the window sills and heads. The cast iron front has been covered by later additions.

* C. & J. Michel (Times Square)--113 S. Third--1892

The two bay windows on the second and third floors are only remaining pair in the city. The sheet metal decoration remains in good condition although in need of paint. Between 1906 and 1910, this building housed the Bijou Theater.

(Pizza Villa) -- 119-121 S. Third -- c1875

This simple building shows its early construction date through the use of two units each three bays wide. More research is needed.

(Golden Garter) -- 123 S. Third -- 1875

Although altered by a modern ground story, the excellent metal front remains intact behind the modern additions.

Building--125 S. Third

Overshadowed by its more ostentatious neighbor, this smaller building has a neatly defined sheet metal cornice and decorative stone window heads that are worthy of note.

* Solberg Bldg. (Markos) Third at Pearl NE--c. 1880

This large commercial building has some of the most decorative stone window heads in the city. The cornice and unusual brickwork make it one of the most outstanding large buildings in the city.

Gantert Block--110-112 S. Third--1885, c. 1875

The dating of these buildings is presently approximate. There were probably three different structures built and the lower floors were altered c. 1880 to their

THIRD STREET (continued)

present appearance. Notable brick work on the cornice and cast iron supports on the ground floor visually unite the different parts.

* P. Wehrs Bldg.--118 S. Third--1874

This three story brick building has a row of lion heads as an unusual decoration beneath its cornice. The brickwork and cast iron ground floor are notable. The ground floor remains relatively unaltered.

(Red Lion)--120 S. Third--c.1870

This building has lost its decorative cornice and the ground floor has been altered, but it retains the distinctive brickwork and window heads.

Esperson Block (Office Lounge)--122-124-126-128 S. Third 1866-68

Originally three stories high, this building seems to have been constructed about the same time as Esperson's building around the corner on Pearl. Like most early stores it is a simple building with the decoration concentrated around the entrances, now altered, and above the windows.

Kroner Bldg. (Schneider's Carpet) -- 300-302 S. Third--1893

This simple building was the large store and warehouse of the Kroner hardware company.

* Thorstad Bldg. (Satan's Den)--401 S. Third -- 1884

This two story building is relatively unchanged although new signs mask its original appearance. The excellent brick cornice, stone decorations and window heads show the original owners pride in his grocery business.

Segelke Kohlhaus Bldg (Bichrome Bulb Co.) -- 403 S. Third--1881

The original band of stained or frosted glass windows still remain above the large display windows. Most downtown business had these originally but few unaltered examples remain.

(Models Unlimited & Alley Cat Books)--405-407 S. Third--c.1881

Although these two buildings seem to be a single unit they were built at different times. The variation in window treatment and the cornice line shows the difference in age.

(Schneider Heating)--411-413-415 S. Third--c.1890

This long two story building is probably two separate structures. The five bays to the south were probably built first and the northern three bays added at a later date.

THIRD STREET (continued)

Old Tribune Bldg. -- Fourth at Cass NE--1938 Kruse and Parish, architects

Built with new techniques for pouring concrete, this building was intended as an architectural showpiece. The restrained decoration and balance of curving and straight parts is typical of the 30's Modern style. New owners have refurbished the exterior.

FOURTH STREET

(Desmonds)--112 S. Fourth --c1922

The tile decorations on this tall thin building are typical of those used after 1910 throughout the midwest. The front is an addition to an older building, the Linker Hotel, and even earlier it seems to have been connected to Pomeroy's Opera House. The new facade used the decorations made famous by Louis Sullivan and his followers.

* Tillman Bros. Block (Leitholds)--116-118 S. Fourth--1889--Stolze and Schick, architect

A Romanesque Revival commercial building in brick, this store has excellent cast iron decoration on the first two floors, one of the few such examples in the city.

* F. Doerre Store--199 S. Fourth--c.1890

Similar to the Lienlokken building in the type of brick used and the decoration, this building is slightly earlier in date. The second story oriel window was less popular in La Crosse near the end of the century, but its use here seems appropriate to the building. The sheet metal cornice is very elaborate but typical for the period. The lower floor was recently covered by a new front.

* Lienlokken Bank--201 S. Fourth--1892

Although the top of the cornice has been removed, this building remains one of the most distinctive of the late nineteenth century examples in the city. The contrast between brick and stone is offset by the terracotta panels. The castiron decoration of the ground floor has recently been covered with a new front.

* Tausche Building--203 S. Fourth -- 1891

This office of the La Crosse hardware firm shows the renewed interest in classical forms that was common during the last decade of the century. The large windows and basement entrance remain unchanged and are almost unique in the city.

Klein Store (Hilton Pharmacy)--Fourth at Jay NE--1892

Although now painted a single color, the individual parts of this building were originally as multicolored as the Leinlokken Bank. The lower floor has

FOURTH STREET (continued)

minor alterations.

Zeisler Building (Edwards China Shop)-- 204 S. Fourth--1889

This three story brick building originally had a stair on one side of the front as access to the upper apartments. The center section of the sheet metal cornice is now gone and modern ironwork has been added. This building was built for George Zeisler, a local brewer.

* Mueller Bldg.(Schultz Clothing)--320-322 S. Fourth--1903

The oriel windows on the second floor have long distinguished this building. Its relative late date of construction shows the continued use of an early form. The central stair serves the apartments above.