

Cornerstones

Preservation Alliance of La Crosse

Winter 2005



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From the President...

The New Year is once again upon us and gives us reason to reflect on the past year. PAL has had an active year, with a well-attended Annual Banquet, a continuation of the Architectural Treasure Hunt, and involvement in the Rotary Lights. We were partners with the LaCrosse County Historical Society in the “Stepping Up to the Past” tours in downtown LaCrosse for the Grand Excursion and again for Historic Downtown LaCrosse Days....And our own Judy Cobb playing a very alluring “bawdy lady”!! We conducted our second annual Heritage Home Tours in September and had gorgeous weather and very good turnout. We added one more ornament to our historic collection, with the War Eagle (to commemorate its distinction as the lead boat during the original Grand Excursion) and have done well with sales. Finally, at year’s end, we hired a new Public Relations Director, Micah Schweizer.

I am stepping into the president’s shoes that Mariel Carlisle is stepping out of, and I can only hope that I can continue the enthusiasm, energy and dedication she has put into her presidency these past few years. The next time you see Mariel, thank her for the wonderful job she has done for PAL. We look forward to a very fulfilling, dynamic and education-filled year in 2005, and welcome you all to join us along the way.

*Barbara Kooiman, President,
Preservation Alliance of La Crosse*

*Watch for upcoming PAL events in each
newsletter...see page 2 for more details!*

"Preservation Presents....."

PAL to Sponsor Historic
Preservation Programs

One important aspect of the mission of the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse is presenting public programs that celebrate the heritage architecture of La Crosse and the surrounding region. In the past, PAL has presented programs on the evolution of the barn in Wisconsin, how to nominate a property as a local landmark, and a program on the Prairie Style homes in La Crosse, to name just a few. We are planning to present at least one film with a historic preservation theme every year and invite speakers with programs that will highlight distinctive properties in the Coulee Region and beyond.

The PAL Board eagerly looks forward to presenting more programs in the upcoming year that are not only informational but also entertaining. These programs are free and open to the public and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the history of our region and also learn more about the importance of historic preservation in supporting the social and economic growth of neighborhoods and downtown commercial districts.

—Eric Wheeler

Please join us on Monday, February 7, at 7pm at the Pump House for a special screening of the award winning documentary **“Lustron: The Home America’s Been Waiting For”** and a presentation on La Crosse’s own Lustron homes. Follow the dramatic rise and fall of the mass-produced all-steel home that many believed would be the “General Motors” of housing.

news in brief... —Mariel Carlisle

Nominations Needed for
Preservation Week Awards

The Preservation Alliance will be seeking nominations for our heritage awards in May and accept nominations any time. This is an annual event which coincides with National Preservation Month. Nominations should include any available historical history, the age of the property, any local or state recognition, and photos of the restoration project. Nomination forms are also available in the office.

Heritage Cookbook in
Planning Stages

Everyone is invited to participate in the production of a cookbook. The La Crosse County Historical Society is seeking old and treasured family recipes for a book which will be available this summer. Anecdotes, memories and even photos will be considered. Mostly, they would like old recipes from traditional family gatherings. Remember, real men do make quiche. And collect recipes! Forms for the recipes are available by checking the website: www.lchs.org. Click on “Links” and then “Cookbook Recipe Form.” You may also stop at the La Crosse County Historical Society office. Happy cooking!

McGilvray Bridges Plan
Centennial Celebration

The Friends of McGilvray Road are planning events to recognize the 100th anniversary of two of the remaining five McGilvray Bridges in the Van Loon Wildlife Area. The event will take place September 10th.

News from the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation

The Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation has announced it is seeking nominations for The Ten Most Endangered Properties in Wisconsin. These nominations should be for properties which are architecturally significant to the state or the local community. Properties can be threatened by neglect, inappropriate remodeling, highway or redevelopment projects. Nomination forms can be obtained by contacting Mariel Carlisle (608) 782-4281 or the PAL office.

One such area is the Sussex/Pewaukee area where the DOT plans a highway expansion project on Highway 164 which calls for the demolition of 5 buildings. One of those buildings was a saloon in the town of Lisbon which reportedly served as an Underground Railroad stop before the Civil War. Residents have struggled for several years to protect their heritage and have not been able to stop expansion plans. Demolition is imminent.

Closer to home, there is a similar highway expansion project planned for the small community of Chaseburg. A small, privately-owned former gas station will be lost when the DOT improves a highway to allow easier turning room for trucks. The owner's efforts to save his garage (former gas station) have not been successful.

The mission of the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation is to advocate for preservation efforts and work for legislative initiatives which impact efforts to preserve our state's heritage. The Trust also recognizes projects for outstanding restoration and preservation efforts each fall.

—*Mariel Carlisle*

John, Ralph and Dan Wettstein (JRD Corporation) were recently recognized for the restoration of the La Crosse Plow Building/Wettstein's Lighting at 214 Pine Street, La Crosse.

To stay or to go. Retailers have long debated the issue and so did the Wettstein brothers, John, Ralph and Dan. The family has been in retail business for over 40 years and the trend was moving away from the downtown. After numerous family consultations, they decided to buck the trend and made a major reinvestment in the downtown retail community. They are proud of their community and have made a significant contribution to its future.

Formerly a factory and then a furniture warehouse, the La Crosse Plow Building suffered from decades of neglect. In 1998 the Wettsteins purchased and then spent \$1.8 million to restore the vacant red brick structure. They meticulously used renovation techniques which would not harm the integrity of the historic value of the building. Numerous bricked-up windows were replaced. The building is now a wonderful facility for their retail lighting division and has offices on the upper floors. Beautiful period sensitive streetscaping and lighting, which the city of La Crosse agreed to fund as part of the project, further improve the commercial neighborhood. The restoration of the building exemplifies the impact such a project has on the vitality of a city.

The Wettstein brothers were early players in the revitalization of downtown La Crosse; the privately-funded project served as a beacon of development and economic recovery and was recognized as a contributing building when they were recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation with the Great American Main Street Award, which the city received in 2002.

They have also renovated an entire city block where Wettsteins Retail Center is located. It also represents a pleasing addition to downtown. Rep. Jennifer Schilling, in her nomination, states: "It is no secret that a vibrant central business district leads to a vibrant community."

La Crosse County Historic Sites Preservation Commission

The La Crosse County HSPC has been busy this fall with a couple of projects. The Commission received a grant from the Wisconsin Historical Society to do further archaeological investigations in the Long Coulee area near Holmen, an area known to be rich with prehistoric Native American sites. A National Register of Historic Places nomination of the site is proposed for the project.

The Commission used some of their funds to reprint copies of the La Crosse Architectural/Historical Survey, which was done in three phases between 1993 and 2002. All three reports have been combined into one bound report, and all public libraries in the county will receive copies. Additionally, Murphy Library at UW-L will be posting a copy on a web site, and the La Crosse Public Library will also, likely, be posting it on their web site, as well as have a circulating copy of the report.

—*Barbara Kooiman*

La Crosse Heritage Preservation Commission

The City's HPC meets once a month on the third Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the south conference room of City Hall. Recently, the HPC has reviewed and accepted landmark designation of the property Bentley House at 938 Cass Street (the "small" house that Jay Lokken and Ken Riley own) as well as adding the carriage house to the original landmark designation for the Bentley-Wheeler House at 950 Cass Street. In November, the commission designated the Wilson School House, owned by Dick and Lisbeth Reynertson, as a city landmark.

The HPC has also been in a negotiation with the owner of the La Crosse Rubbermills building on St. Andrew Street. An agreement has finally been made to designate the primary (south and west) facades of the Rubbermills building, and not the rear portions which are not visible from the streets.

This allows the owners to make exterior changes to the north and east facades without coming to the HPC for a Certificate of Appropriateness on their changes. All parties seem pleased with the final designation. Thanks to Tim Acklin at the City Planning Department for conducting those negotiations.

For more information on the LaCrosse HPC, please go to http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/HPC/hpc_home.html
Or "google" the City of LaCrosse, click the link for Planning, then the link for Historic Preservation. A downloadable copy of the landmark nomination form can be found on the site.

—*Barbara Kooiman*

Cobbler Shop Restoration

The Rediske cobbler shop project is under wraps for the winter.

Throughout the summer volunteers worked on the interior of the cobbler shop. Holes in the tin ceiling were repaired with matching sections recovered from demolished buildings and donated by Phil Addis. The entire ceiling was then wire-brushed and repainted.

The interior walls have been replastered and painted. Dave Morrison and Judy Cobb spent several evenings painting trim and wainscoting with assistance from Patrick Kirchberg. All interior colors were specially mixed to match the originals as closely as possible.

Late this fall a special donation was made by Virgil Olson, who lives across from the original 12th Street location of the cobbler shop. Years ago he attended an auction of items from the shop and house and purchased what appears to be the original stove for the shop. After reading about the renovation, he decided to donate this stove to the project. This squat, square cast-iron stove is a unique addition to the cobbler shop.

This summer the floors will be stripped of their old linoleum and restored. Some outside painting is still required. And with the help of Eric Wheeler and the La Crosse County Historical Society we hope to identify the types of displays that will be appropriate for the building.

—*Dave Morrison*

PAL Hires New PR Director

As the new Public Relations Director of PAL, I'd like to take a moment (or a column) to introduce myself. My wife and I moved to La Crosse this past September, and we were immediately taken with the many charming aspects of the city, especially the lovely downtown and the riverfront. (We were also initially charmed by the weather, but that has long since faded.)

I have always seen historic preservation as an issue of great importance. I spent my childhood in Switzerland and many a Sunday afternoon was spent playing in and around some Roman ruins in a nearby town. This early exposure to physical history has led to a strong belief in the importance of maintaining physical connections to our past.

On this side of the Atlantic, I spent most of my time in rural Pennsylvania, where I attended Bucknell University, majoring in French and German. I taught middle and high school German for two years before moving to Berkeley, California. There, I spent a year working as intake and activities coordinator for a substance abuse recovery program. I'm excited to now be a part of PAL, and I look forward to furthering the preservation of La Crosse's heritage.

I will be maintaining regular office hours at the Pump House on Tuesday and Friday afternoons. I very much look forward to meeting more members of this great organization!

—*Micah Schweizer*

Medallion Sale Update

PAL's 2004 Commemorative Medallion, the War Eagle, was a very popular item this holiday season. We still have some available at the Pump House. We especially want to thank the select local gift shops who sold the ornament for us: Rowleys, Franciscan Skemp Gift Shoppe, Gundersen Lutheran Gift Shop, Satori Arts, Stamp 'N Hand, JMP Gallery, Finnottes, Feminine Fancies, Ambiance, Cheddarheads, Belissimo, the La Crosse County Historical Society, Heart's Desire, Designing Jewelers, and of course, the Pump House.

—*Mariel Carlisle*

Tsunami Heritage Recovery Fund Seeks Donations

Overwhelmed by the images, sounds and stories of the ongoing tragedy in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and other Indian Ocean countries, the International Council on Monuments and Sites will be accepting donations immediately to the US/ICOMOS Tsunami Heritage Recovery Fund. The Fund will be destined to support heritage-related recovery and reconstruction initiatives and projects defined by the ICOMOS National Committees in those countries affected by the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

In the face of such an unprecedented catastrophe, US/ICOMOS realizes that basic humanitarian relief must remain the first and foremost priority. In fact, we trust that massive support for those efforts will shorten the period of extreme need, paving the way to full recovery and reconstruction.

It is in this spirit of helping to re-build for a better future that US/ICOMOS has launched this effort, whose need has been confirmed by our colleagues in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The Fund is based on the firm belief that the collective memory embodied in the built

environment is a basic part of community life, and essential to sustainable recovery in the traumatic aftermath of such loss and devastation. The establishment of the Fund also recognizes the limited funding available to heritage sites, whether during emergencies or normal times.

Donations to the organization and to the Tsunami Heritage Recovery Fund are tax-exempt. Donations made in January of 2005 may be claimed on the donor's 2004 income tax return.

Please make your check payable to **“US/ICOMOS Tsunami Heritage Recovery Fund”** and mail to US/ICOMOS, 401 F Street NW – Room 331, Washington DC 20001-2728.

Annual Winter Party a Success

Though snowy and a bit icy, PAL board and members with a few new friends gathered at the Wilson School, the historic one-room school building so delightfully renovated by Dr. Richard and Lisbeth Reynertson on Hwy 14/61 on the south edge of LaCrosse. The Reynertsons obtained the little brick building which is adjacent to their house, and completely rehabbed it, by putting in a new ceiling, refinishing the floors, fixing windows, adding an open kitchen, and adding bedrooms and bath to the downstairs space. They now rent it to weekend or weekly visitors, and it was the perfect setting for a winter gathering. PAL board members brought their favorite appetizers, and guests mingled amongst the historic school photos and visited on the afternoon of Sunday, January 9. Always a pleasant event, this year was no exception. —*Barbara Kooiman*



Board members l to r, Patrick Kirchberg, Sharon Ryan, Lisbeth Reynertson, Barbara Kooiman, Micah Schweizer (PR Director), Mariel Carlisle and Jon Erickson



Generally revelry



Former board member David Henke and new PR Director Micah Schweizer

Join PAL!

Yes! I will support historic preservation thru membership in the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse.

Name

Address

City/State

Zip Code

(____)____
Phone Number



- \$500 and above (Presidents Circle/Corporate)
 - \$250-\$499 (Heritage/Business)
 - \$100-\$249 (Patron/Business)
 - \$50-\$99 (Supporting/Small Business)
 - \$30 (Household)
 - \$20 (Individual)
 - \$15 (Senior/Student)
-

Please return to:

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