

Cornerstones

Preservation Alliance of La Crosse

December 2005



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From the President...

Here we are, with short days, snow is on the ground, and Christmas decorations already popping up. I let out a sigh of resignation a few weeks ago when I noticed the city had capped the tops of the cast-iron bubblers around town for the winter.... A sure sign of pending winter!

There are many exciting preservation projects going on around town. The “unveiling” of the Rowley’s Office Supply Building is no small thing, as well as the continued restoration of the La Crosse Furniture building on Third Street, and the Crossfire Ministries building on Main Street are cause for celebration. Additionally, the Hixon House restoration is completed, and the building is now open to the public.

Next time you’re in the vicinity of City Hall, drive by the Hixon House, the Greek Revival House and the Cobbler Shop buildings! All are looking fantastic, especially with a much needed paint job on the Greek Revival House. Thanks much to Bill and Tim Pendelton, painters who donated several of their hours to getting the job done, and done right. It looks fantastic. Thanks also to the Crogan Glass Company on Rose Street, who repaired the 3 pane window over the door without charge.

Be watching for an invitation to the PAL Holiday Party, which will be in early January this year. We are still working out the details, but will give you plenty of time to get us on your calendars!

We, at PAL, wish all of you a happy and joyous holiday season!!

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

PAL Announces 2005 Commemorative Medallion

The Holiday Season is here, and the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse is pleased to announce our 2005 commemorative medallion, "The McGilvray Bridges." Our 18th commemorative offering celebrates the centennial of the Seven Bridges Road.

Five steel bridges were constructed 1905-1908 by the La Crosse Bridge and Steel Company. Designed by Charles Horton, the arch truss bridges are located along a two mile walking trail in the McGilvray Bottoms, Van Loon Wildlife Area, between La Crosse County and Trempealeau County.

The addition of a main channel bridge and a wooden bridge lead to the local nickname "Seven Bridges Road." The main channel bridge was dismantled in 1954, while the wooden bridge was destroyed by fire in 1985. The original five steel bridges were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 but were slated for demolition in 1989 because the Department of Natural Resources could no longer afford the maintenance of the road or justify spending money for the restoration of the bridges, some of them in twisted condition because pilings and supports had disintegrated and decks were not safe for pedestrians. The road was

closed and prospects looked bleak. Years of hard work, creative fund raising, and love for the two mile trail in the Van Loon Wildlife area were rewarded in 1997 when the Old Road was re-opened.

The Preservation Alliance was very instrumental in helping save the historic bridges by organizing a successful letter-writing campaign, providing leadership assistance and lending money to the small group of concerned citizens from the Holmen area. Several PAL members helped set up a separate non-profit corporation, organized very successful fund-raising projects and still remain active in the Friends of McGilvray Road organization.

We hope you will join PAL's recognition of the McGilvray Bridges centennial by adding the medallion to your collection! Medallions are available at the following locations: Bellissimo Beauty Salon, Designing Jewelers, Feminine Fancies, Finnotte's, Gunderson Lutheran Gift Shop, Heart's Desire, Stamp 'n Hand, The La Crosse County Historical Society, La Fleur Jardin, Citizen's First Bank, La Crosse Visitor's Bureau, Satori Arts, Franciscan Skemp Gift Shoppe, and the Pump House Regional Arts Center.



2005 Heritage Home Tour Wrap-up

Another brilliant mid-September day provided the setting for the 3rd Annual Preservation Alliance of La Crosse Heritage Home tour. In spite of the nearly perfect weather, excellent publicity and fine selection of well located historic homes the turnout was low compared to the two previous years. The four featured homes this year were all located in the historic Cass and Tenth neighborhood and ranged from the high-style late Victorian Queen Anne to an architect-designed Prairie Style bungalow. Special thanks to hosts Ken Riley and Jay Lokken, Scott and Katie Koenen, Ken and Jill Bernstein and Laura Nelson for their generous support. And of course, thanks to all of the volunteers! Thoughts for next year's tour expressed at a wrap-up meeting on the 2005 tour include modifying the format to more "open house" approach to possibly taking the year off in 2006. What do you think dear reader?

"Preservation Presents" series continues at the Pump House

Local history enthusiast and retired priest Fr. Bernard McGarty presented a fascinating illustrated lecture on "Percy Dwight Bentley and the Prairie Style in La Crosse" on Monday, October 24 at the Pump House Regional Arts Center. In his relaxed yet scholarly style, Fr. McGarty displayed his deep understanding of architectural history and related his own take on the development of "organic architecture" and the roots of the Chicago School in the late 19th century. From the macro to the micro, he related the personal history of PD Bentley from his background in a well-to-do banking family in La Crosse, to his schooling in the Sullivan-Wright aura of downtown Chicago and his career in architecture in La Crosse, the Twin Cities and finally on the west coast in Oregon. A large audience in the Dayton Theatre warmly received Fr. McGarty and many lingered after the program to socialize and share perspectives on the distinctive Prairie School legacy in La Crosse. Special thanks to PAL president Barb Kooiman for providing the digital images. Thanks again to Fr. McGarty for the gift of his time and interest in historic preservation in La Crosse.

—*Eric Wheeler*

"Preservation Presents..." Coming Events:

"Preservation Presents" continues with our mid-winter film feature on Monday, **February 6** at 7:00 PM at the Pump House. This season the film is "My Architect", an award winning biographical documentary on the life and architectural artistry of Louis Kahn; produced and directed by his son Nathaniel Kahn.

On Monday, **March 27** at 7:00 PM at the Pump House Jim Draeger, senior architectural historian at the Wisconsin Historical Society will present an illustrated program on "Catalog Homes in Wisconsin".

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Coming Events (cont.)

The Preservation Alliance will celebrate Historic Preservation Week with another Architectural Treasure Hunt in early **May** followed by a program by local architectural historian and PAL board member Eric Wheeler on the “Heritage Architecture of the Franciscan Neighborhood”. Eric recently collaborated with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in the production of a walking tour brochure of the historic Franciscan buildings and has written a National Register Nomination for the Romanesque Revival Maria Angelorum Chapel completed in 1906.

Updates...

La Crosse Heritage Preservation Commission

The City’s HPC, which meets once a month on the third Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the south conference room of City Hall, has had some commissioner changes in the past month or so. In September the mayor appointed Jim Bloedorn as a second city councilman to be on the HPC. Additionally, he did not reappoint Myrna “Dee” Peacock (who had been on the HPC for 25 years) and architect Scott Halweg. Instead, he appointed Wayne Olson and George Hammond as new commission members. Remaining on the commission are Barbara Kooiman, Doug Farmer, Charles Clemence, Terry Collins and Patricia Araktingi.



December is Rotary Lights Time!

Be sure to stop by to see the PAL tree at this year’s Rotary Lights display! Special thanks to our volunteers who helped with preparation and set up for Rotary Lights: Judy Cobb Tom Bruemmer, Lyle Peacock, Myrna Peacock, Mariel Carlisle, Dina Siafutdiava, Micah Schweizer, Jim Gallagher, and Barb Kooiman.

The HPC designated Myrick Park (excluding the zoo) as a city landmark at their November meeting. For more information on the La Crosse HPC, please go to http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/Planning/HPC/hpc_home.html.

—*Barbara Kooiman*

La Crosse County Historic Sites Preservation Commission

The La Crosse County Historic Sites Preservation Commission has been busy with a few projects. They have just recently applied for a grant from the Wisconsin Historical Society to do historical and archaeological work in Mormon Coulee (town of Shelby) adjacent to the historic Oehler Farmsteads. Notification of grant awards will be in February 2006. The commission will be considering the nomination of the Laura Schwalbe House at the December meeting.

—*Barbara Kooiman*