

Cornerstones

Preservation Alliance of La Crosse

August 2006



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From the President...

The summer is flying by us, as summer always does. The May Banquet now seems so long ago, while the fall Heritage Home Tour will be on us before we know it. In the meantime, the PAL board has been busy planning future events and looking at ways to increase PAL's organization and usefulness.

We are excited to be in the early stages of planning and funding a PAL website. We would like to be able to post upcoming events, news of past events, preservation-worthy news locally and beyond, and have a venue to promote and sell our annual ornament. If any of you out there in the PAL membership and friends are interested in providing expertise or advice on this venture, we are more than interested in hearing from you.

We are pleased to be part of the Pump House tent on Saturday, August 5th, at the Sesquicentennial celebration at Riverside Park, which is part of the CenturyTel's Sand on the Riverfront event. The event is Thursday, August 3rd through Sunday, August 6th. If you are down there on Saturday, please stop by the tent and say hello! For more information on the events that weekend, go to www.lax150.com.

Finally, as you will see in our newsletter, we are very excited to be offering the Gundersen Cottage on Barron's Island as our exclusive Heritage Home Tour this year. We plan to have refreshments and a leisurely tour of the cottage, which is a beautiful blend of Bentley/Merman-designed Arts and Crafts with a Norwegian twist. The grounds face the Mississippi and the entire experience will be a unique way to see this delightful property.

Enjoy the remainder of the summer!
Yours in preservation,

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

Announcing the 2006 Heritage Home Tour

The Preservation Alliance of La Crosse announces the **4th Annual Heritage Home Tour** set for **Sunday, October 8, 2006** from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. This year's home tour features just one home, and a spectacular one it is!

Perched on the northern tip of Barron Island, the Adolf and Helga Gundersen Summer Cottage is architecturally and historically unique in the city of La Crosse. The Nordic influenced Arts and Crafts style cottage was designed in 1918 by noted Prairie Style architects Percy Dwight Bentley and Otto Merman for Dr. Adolf Gundersen, a Norwegian immigrant and founder of the Gundersen Clinic in La Crosse. The three-season cottage features all original windows and doors as well as a native stone fireplace and locally hand-crafted interior woodwork and decorative trim. Built for Adolph Gundersen's Norwegian-born wife Helga, Dr. Gundersen wished to create a rustic but beautiful riverside retreat for her and the family that would have a feel of their homeland. Family lore indicates that he even named the location "Helgaland" in honor of his wife.

The cottage is still owned by the Gundersen family and for four generations has provided a close-by summer get-away for family members in one of the most scenic and private river-side locations in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Tickets are \$10 per person and will be available for advance purchase at several local businesses. They can also be purchased the day of the tour. For more information, contact the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse at (608) 784-1976.



The Great Room
(photo: Roger Grant)



The South Entrance
(photo: Roger Grant)

"Preservation Presents..."
Boathouses of the Upper Mississippi

Monday, October 16
7:00pm, at the Pump House

The Upper Mississippi River represents many things to many people: the romance of steamboats, a "highway" for exploration and economic development of our country, a place of exquisite natural beauty and a rich recreational treasure. It is Walt Whitman's America singing.

The River we know in the bluff country of southwestern Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota boasts a unique marine architectural heritage: Floating Boathouses. From Stoddard to Trempealeau, and Brownsville to Red Wing, these tiny floating shanties are clustered near parks, in marinas, and along railroad rights of way beside the Mississippi. What are they? Where did they come from? When were they built?

An Upper Mississippi River Boathouse is neither a boat nor a house. It is designed to house a boat, and can also be a weekend getaway spot, with a small living space

adjacent to the boat slip. It is utilitarian, simple, and homegrown, without modern conveniences, and has a camp or cottage feel. It is permanently moored on the river, is buoyed by plastic barrels, and floats up and down with changing river levels. Overall, Boathouses are simple and locally built; however, they are regulated by a complex system including state natural resources departments, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, municipalities, and marinas. The Mississippi River Boathouse is a middle-class cultural icon, born of the 1940's and 1950's postwar values and lifestyles.

Finding herself "hooked" by Boathouses, Marti Phillips began seeking historical background on these fascinating structures... Finding few written materials, and no recognized history, she decided to research and write a book on this subject. PAL will host a program about her project to the Monday, October 16th, at 7 p.m. You are invited to attend, not only to learn more about Boathouse history, but also to share information or your stories about local Boathouses. The event is free.

PAL Announces 2006 Treasures of the Past Medallion

The history of brewing in La Crosse can be traced back as far as the city itself—150 years! To celebrate La Crosse's brewing heritage, in conjunction with the city's Sesquicentennial, PAL's 2006 Treasures of the Past ornament will be King Gambrinus, "the patron saint of beer." Gambrinus is a well-known figure in La Crosse, with statues across from City Brewing Company on South Third Street and at the entrance of Firstlogic on Harborview Plaza. Images of the King of Beer can also be seen at the Oktoberfest grounds.

The ornament will be available for purchase in the fall, but you can get a sneak preview of King Gambrinus—the 19th ornament in PAL's Treasures of the Past series—on **Saturday, August 5th**. PAL will have a table in the Pump House tent at the Sand on the Riverfront/Sesquicentennial celebration. It's also a great opportunity to fill in the gaps in your medallion collection!

May Preservation Banquet and Heritage Awards

PAL celebrated Preservation Month in May with a wonderful banquet meal at Piggy's Restaurant (the apple dessert was especially delicious!) and Heritage Preservation Awards after dinner in the Dayton Theater at the Pump House on May 23.

We offered awards in three categories this year.

Commercial Rehabilitation/Adaptive Reuse
Piggy's Restaurant, 501 Front Street.
Chris Roderique, owner.

Residential Rehabilitation
Two rental houses, West Avenue and State Street. Russ Wedeking, owner.

Adaptive Reuse
The Photographer (formerly Bethel Lutheran Church), 1452 George Street.
Jim Thiele, owner.

Residential Rehabilitation
Bentley Wheeler House and Bentley House, 952 Cass Street. Jay Lokken and Ken Riley, owners.

The owners all talked about their preservation projects, and we showed before and after photos for some of the properties. Special thanks to PAL board member Roger Grant for the beautiful photos of each property.



Banquet at Piggy's, before the presentations



PAL President Barbara Kooiman with Tammy and Chris Roderique



The Photographer, 1452 George St.
(photo: Roger Grant)

Host Families Wanted!

The World Heritage Exchange Program is seeking host families for international high school students participating in a one-year exchange program.

For more information, contact Mariel Carlisle:
(608) 385-1938

La Crosse Heritage Preservation Commission Update

The La Crosse HPC has been busy lately with local designations and historic preservation reviews. At the July meeting, the HPC voted unanimously to designate the historic Fred Kroner House at 923 Cameron Avenue. The owners, Douglas and Jean Starritt, brought the nomination before the commission and were pleased at the commissions enthusiasm. The house, part of the National Register listed 10th and Cass Streets Historic District, is a two story painted brick Italianate style house and was built in the early 1870s. The house remained in the Kroner family until the 1950s.

The HPC accepted the nomination for public hearing of the L.E. Meason House at 208 9th St. S. and will review that possible designation at the August meeting.

The HPC also is considering historic issues pertaining to the Amtrak Depot which has a historic preservation covenant attached to its ownership. New lessees—owners of the new Train Station BBQ restaurant at the site—will be considering historic signage for their business and will look at options to mask the appearance of a roof-top vent they installed for their kitchen.

Finally, the HPC is considering the how to acknowledge or record the houseboats on the Black and Mississippi Rivers in La Crosse, and what can be done to protect them as a historic resource in our community. Anyone with any information for the HPC can contact Tim Acklin at 789-7391 in the City Planning Department.

La Crosse County Historic Sites Preservation Commission Update

The LCHSPC has been working on a few projects this summer. They are in the process of printing up copies of a brochure outlining how to designate a county landmark. Additionally, the commission is looking at the possible designation of a number of county historic properties, including the Striped School (Farmington), the Oehler Farmsteads (Shelby), the Mindoro Cut (Hamilton/Farmington) and the Lake Neshonoc Dam and Powerhouse (Hamilton). The commission has also sent a letter of support to the Wisconsin Historical Society considering the Mindoro Cut for designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

The LCHSPC gives grants totaling up to \$1,000 to local historical groups in the county each year, and this year they have awarded money to the Bangor Area Historical Society for insulated curtains for their historic building/museum (\$400). Additionally, grant money will be given to the Onalaska Area Historical Society for the purchase of lighted glass cases (\$600). Congratulations to both groups.

—*Barbara Kooiman*

Why Historic Preservation is Smart Growth

By **Donovan Rykema**

1. Public Infrastructure. Almost without exception, historic buildings are where public infrastructure already exists. No new water line, sewer lines, streets, curbs or gutters are required.
2. Municipalities need financial resources if they are going to grow smart. Vacant, unused and underused historic buildings brought back to life are also brought back as tax-generating assets for a community.
3. New activities - residential, retail, office and manufacturing - in historic buildings inherently reinforces the viability of public transportation.
4. If we are to expect citizens to use their cars less, and use their feet more, than the physical environment within which they live, work, shop and play needs to have a pedestrian rather than a vehicular orientation.
5. Another element in the drive to encourage human movement by means other than the automobile is the interconnection of uses. Based on the foolishness of post-World War II planning and development patterns, uses have been sharply separated. Historic neighborhoods were built from the beginning with a mix of uses in close proximity. Cities with foresight to readjust their zoning to encourage integration of uses are seeing that interconnectivity reemerging in historic areas.
6. As a strong proponent of economic development, I am certainly glad the phrase is "Smart Growth," as opposed to no growth. Smart Growth suggests that growth has positive benefits, and I would agree that is true. At the same time we cannot say we are having smart growth - regardless of how well it is physically planned - if at the same time we are abandoning existing assets. The encouraged reinvestment in historic areas in and of itself revitalizes and revalues the nearby existing investment of both the public and private sector.
7. We see periodic headlines about some real or imagined "Back to the City" movement. Certainly, people moving back to the core of a town or city of any size has a positive impact on a whole range of environmental goals. Well, across America and in many places in my home state of New York, people are indeed moving "back to the city." But almost nowhere is it "back to the city" in general. In nearly every instance it is back to the historic neighborhoods and buildings within the city. We do need to pay attention to market patterns, and if it is back to historic neighborhoods to which people are moving, we need to keep those neighborhoods viable for that to happen.
8. Smart Growth ought to imply not just physical growth but economic growth. And economic growth means new jobs. But who is creating the net of new jobs in America? Not General Motors, or IBM, or Kodak. Eighty-five percent of all new jobs in America are created by small businesses. And for most small businesses there are few costs that are controllable, but there is one - occupancy. Barring massive public subsidies, you cannot build new and rent cheap. Older and historic buildings often provide the affordable rent that allows small business needs to get started.
9. Business districts are sustainably successful when there is a diversity of businesses. And that diverse mix requires a diverse range of rental rates. Only in downtowns and older commercial neighborhoods is there such a diversity. Try finding any rental rate diversity in the regional shopping center or the so-called office park. There isn't any. Older business districts with their diverse rents are Smart Growth. *(continued on page 7)*

10. Smart growth ought to be about jobs. Let me distinguish new construction from rehabilitation in terms of creating jobs. As a general rule, new construction is 50 percent labor and 50 percent materials. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, is 60 to 70 percent labor. While we put in an HVAC system from Ohio, sheet-rock from Texas and timber from Oregon, we buy the services of the carpenter and plumber, painter and electrician from across the street. They subsequently spend that paycheck for a haircut, membership in the local Y and a new car, resulting in a significantly greater local economic impact dollar than new construction. The rehabilitation of older structures is Smart Growth.
11. Solid waste landfill is increasingly expensive in both dollars and environmental quality. Twenty-four percent of most landfill sites is made up of construction debris. And much of that waste comes from the razing of existing structures. Preserving instead of demolishing out inventory of historic buildings reduces that construction waste.
12. Its critics have pointed out that the so-called New Urbanism is neither new nor urban. But I don't think anyone here would dispute that in most instances, at least, New Urbanist development is fully compatible with the goals of Smart Growth. I would argue that New Urbanism reflects good urban design principles. But those principles have already been at work for a century or more in our historic neighborhoods.
13. Smart Growth advocates a density of use. Historic residential and commercial neighborhoods are built to be dense.
14. Historic buildings themselves are not liabilities as often seen by public and private-sector demolition advocates, but are assets not yet returned to productive use.
15. The rehabilitation of older and historic neighborhoods is putting jobs where the workers already are.
16. Around the country historic preservation is the one form of economic development that is simultaneously community development.
17. Reinvigorating historic neighborhoods reinforces existing schools and allows them to recapture their important educational, social, and cultural role on a neighborhood level.
18. No new land is consumed when rehabilitating a historic building.
19. The diversity of housing sites, qualities, styles and characteristics of historic neighborhoods stands in sharp contrast to the monolithic character of current subdivisions. The diversity of housing opinions means a diversity of human beings who can live in historic neighborhoods.
20. Historic preservation constitutes a demand-side approach to Smart Growth. I'm not at all opposed to acquiring greenbelts around cities or development rights on agricultural properties. Those are certainly important and valuable tools in a comprehensive Smart Growth strategy. But they only reduce the supply of land to be developed - they do not address the demand for the use of that land. The conversion of a historic warehouse into 40 residential units reduces the demand for ten acres of farmland. The economic revitalization of Main Street reduces the demand for another strip center. The restoration of empty 1920s skyscrapers reduces the demand for another glass-and-chrome building at the office park. Again, I don't mean to be remotely critical of supply-side strategies, but without demand-side responses their successes will be limited at best.

*Donovan Rykema is a nationally known consultant on historic preservation economics. This article is reprinted from **Wisconsin Preservation News**, the newsletter of the Historic Preservation Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society.*