

PAL PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE OF
LA CROSSE

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2026 PAL Calendar Toasting La Crosse Taverns



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Ornaments and Calendars on sale now!

A Message from the President

Greetings members and friends of PAL! My name is Marc Zettler, I am the new President of PAL after a long-term presidency by Barb Kooiman. After many years as PAL President, Barb has stepped down to the role of Secretary.

2025 has been a year of transition for PAL with a change in leadership and retirement of long-time PAL staff member Candace Brown. We thank Candy for her dedication to PAL and wish her well in her next chapter!

Our PAL Holiday Party took place in January at the home of Chuck Summers. The J. Bayer House was designed by Otto Merman and Herbert Skogstad in the Mediterranean Style.

In June, PAL celebrated the Heritage Awards Banquet at Cappella Arts Center (Matt Curtis), a Heritage Award winner for its adaptive reuse to modify a church into 3 distinct event spaces. Other winners were the Razy Wright House (Dan & Kate Moen), Strassers Tavern (Kory Bessinger) and architectural historian Dr. Les Crocker (posthumously).

PAL has been continuing to fight for our city's cultural heritage. In recent months PAL has advocated for saving the city's historic bubblers - an update is provided in this newsletter. PAL has also nominated Hogan School as a Local Historic Landmark in an effort to prevent its demolition.

PAL is following local preservation efforts throughout the region. This newsletter features a story on West Salem's Octagon Houses.

Be sure to look for our 2025 Christmas Ornament and 2026 Calendars on sale now!

Marc Zettler

President

PAL Heritage Awards Banquet

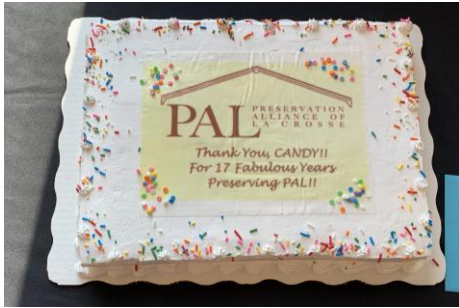


Photo: Jennifer Zettler

**Thank you, Candy!!
For 17 Fabulous Years
Preserving PAL!**



Photo: Jennifer Zettler

Dr. Les Crocker, architectural historian (posthumously awarded)

PAL Heritage Awards photos: Roger Grant



Cappella Arts Center (Matt Curtis) - 7th and King Streets, La Crosse



Razy Wright House
(Dan & Kate Moen)



Strassers Tavern (Kory
Bessinger), 1310 Denton St.

PAL Pushes to Keep Historic Bubblers

The battle of the bubblers was initiated by the City's plan to remove the green drinking fountains scattered throughout the city. PAL spoke out about the historic significance of the drinking fountains, or "bubblers" that have been designated as city historic sites.

History

The cast iron bubbler/drinking fountain was made for the city at the James Foundry ca. 1920. They featured bas-relief designs on the sides of a rounded pedestal topped by a bowl and water bubbler (Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory, "Water Bubbler", La Crosse, WI, References 132638 & 132639). When designated, 36 identical bubblers provided drinking water to thirsty members of the public when out and about in warm weather months. These bubblers have started to disappear and the remaining bubblers haven't been turned on for the summer months. An informal inventory tells us there are only 22 left on the streets. Their removal by Public Works is for reasons unknown to PAL.



Photo: Wisconsin Historical Society

Accessibility excuse

The justification by the city to remove them favors the installation of more ADA (refers to the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act, in effect since 1990) compliant drinking fountains. PAL argued that the accessibility guidelines for drinking fountains does not mandate removal of those suitable for standing persons – in reality the provisions require pairs of drinking fountains suitable for a person in a wheelchair and a standing person (WI Admin Code SPS 361.05 adopting International Building Code 2021, refer to IBC 1110.5.1). Even if the historic bubblers are not in service, their presence is a historically significant feature of La Crosse.

Two Resolutions

The battle of the bubblers resulted in two resolutions for the Judiciary and Administrative (J&A) Committee meeting: one calling for operating bubblers that do not meet federal accessibility standards to be installed and another to delay the removal of bubblers to study more options. The bubblers designated for replacement were at the following locations: 3rd and Cass (near the bridges), 4th and King, West Ave and Jackson, State and Losey, near Myrick Park (WIZM News Talk, "Keeping green bubblers up for debate in La Crosse by Brad Williams, July 24, 2025).

PAL members thirsty for historic preservation

PAL shared our desire to keep the historic bubblers on Facebook on 7/25/2025:

PAL has looked at this issue, and it appears that ADA compliant bubblers could be installed in the vicinity of the historic, green bubblers, thus leaving the City in compliance with ADA regulations. Removal of the historic bubblers is not necessary. Also, all of the remaining bubblers (over 30) were designated as local historic landmarks about 15 years ago by the city's Heritage Preservation Commission. The Facebook post asked for thoughts on how City Council should handle this issue.

Responders hoped the City Council would vote to keep the historic bubblers, noting installation of accessible bubblers would be the best solution. One responder wished that those affected be asked what accommodation they need and provided an example of providing disposable cups. [Note, this is permitted in WI Commercial Building Code: SPS 362.2902(1)2.] A disabled responder wished the historic bubblers would be left alone. Respondents to the post also lamented on the trend of losing more valuable history in La Crosse – elements that make the city unique.



Photo credit: Barbara Kooiman

PAL posted a Call to Action on August 2, 2025 stating there is plenty of room for compromise to meet ADA requirements without removing the historic bubblers. Responders reiterated a desire to maintain history and a thirst for the summertime amenity to be turned on. Some also wrote letters or came to speak at the J & A Committee meeting on August 5, 2025.

Result

The La Crosse Council voted 7 to 6, motion passes to keep the bubblers!

Octagon House Preservation in Progress

An octagon house is a unique historic architectural style, and West Salem has two! These houses were built by the Palmer brothers in the 1850s and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Palmer-Lewis Octagon was built in 1855 at Neshonoc, moved to the Town of Hamilton location in 1866, and moved again in 2007 down the road. The Palmer-Gullickson Octagon was built next door in 1859 with an addition in 1860 and moved to its present location in 1866 (Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory, “Palmer Brothers’ Octagons”, West Salem, WI, Reference ID 16237).



Photo: Wisconsin Historical Society

Octagon Fad

Octagon houses are 8-sided houses in the US and Canada built in the 1850s due to a widely publicized book, *The Octagon House: A Home For All, or A New, Cheap, Convenient and Superior Mode of Building*, printed in 1848. The author was not an architect but America's foremost lecturer and writer on phrenology, the pseudoscience of defining an individual's characteristics by the contours of the skull. Fowler's book promoted the advantages of the octagon shape over that of the rectangle for living and resulted in a few thousand homes, mostly in the Midwest, East Coast and Canada. The premise is that the octagon encloses approximately 20% additional space with the same perimeter as a square. Fowler stated that the house was cheaper to build, received more natural light, was easier to heat in winter and keep cool in summer. Fowler's personal house was eventually known as “Fowler's Folly”. Construction of the 60-room mansion was started in 1848, took 5 years to complete. It was rented out during the financial panic of 1857, fell into disrepair, condemned and was demolished in 1897. (Wikipedia / Octagon house)

Palmer Brothers' Pair of Octagons

History courtesy of the West Salem Historical Society

(<https://westsalemhistoricalsociety.org>)

The pair of octagon houses were originally located at Neshonoc, an area north of present day West Salem, near the La Crosse River.

Dr. Horace Palmer's House: The Palmer-Gullickson Octagon House was built in 1856 in Neshonoc by its first resident doctor. When the railroad was built in West Salem, residents left Neshonoc for West Salem. The doctor followed, moving his home to its present-day location to be closer to his patients. The process of moving the house took three weeks, during which time the Palmer family kept living in the house. The house and its wing addition were split to make the move easier. The house sold in 1876 to Dr. Mary Lottridge, the second woman doctor in the US. The house sold again to Roy Gilfillan who turned the doctor's office into an apartment. In 1921 it sold to Mr. & Mrs. Oliver Gullickson, with son

and daughter-in-law Dr. F.L. & Mrs. Rachel Gullickson living in the attached apartment. Rachel's generosity and desire for the preservation and public access allowed WSHS to obtain the home.

Monroe Palmer's House: The Palmer-Lewis Octagon House was built by Palmer in Neshonoc in 1857 and purchased by David R. Lewis in 1890 and owned by the Lewis family until grandson David's death in 2007. It was gifted to the West Salem Historical Society with the caveat that the house needed to be moved. It was not in the original location, but it was in close proximity. A barn added sometime after 1978 was removed prior to the WSHS move. Today the Palmer-Lewis Octagon House is home to the West Salem Tourist Center and is located near the Neshonoc Dam on highways 16 & 108.

Preservation

The Palmer-Gullickson Octagon House (PGO) preservation efforts have begun after stabilization of the porches. The roof was replaced in the fall of 2024 and work continues with porch restoration. Modern siding was removed to reveal tin siding stamped to look like bricks that covered the original wood clapboard siding. Volunteers are involved in painting the wood to be installed by a local preservation contractor. Planning efforts are under way for phase 2, the remainder of the exterior restoration: siding repair, window/door restoration, ramp and accessible entry. Stay tuned for more updates!



Photo: Marc Zettler



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

_____	☐ \$250 (Business/Supporting)
Name	☐ \$100 (Patron)
_____	☐ \$50 (Household)
Address	☐ \$30 (Individual)
_____	☐ \$20 (Senior)
City/State	☐ \$15 (Student)

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