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ALLIANCE OF
LA CROSSE
Cornerstones May 2021

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Historic Preservation Month



We usually try to release our newsletter in March or April, but since January we've focused most of our time and energy on saving Fire Station No. 4 from demolition.

So we'd like to begin this newsletter by thanking all of our supporters. If you signed the petition, or called or emailed the City Council opposing the demolition of Fire Station No.4, thank you! If we're ultimately successful in saving Fire Station No.4, it will be in large part because of your help.

—PAL Board of Directors

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The Effort To Save Fire Station No. 4 by David Riel



In November 2020, the La Crosse Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) were finishing a new initiative, the 10 Most Endangered Historic Properties list. HPC had recently learned there were plans to demolish Fire Station No.4 and added it to the endangered list. Fire Chief Gilliam appeared at the December 17 HPC meeting, and commission members tried to convey the fire station's historic, cultural and economic significance. After the holidays, PAL also got involved in the effort.

HPC Commissioner and PAL Board Member David Riel met with Fire Chief Gilliam on February 5 to try and find a solution. It became obvious any change in plans would have to come from the City Council or Mayor. Because of the pandemic, we decided to create an online petition. This gave us a chance to convey the significance of the building to a wide audience while keeping everyone safe. We submitted a National Register Questionnaire to the Wisconsin Historical Society, and they evaluated Fire Station No. 4 as potentially eligible for the State and National Register of Historic Places. This also meant State and Federal Historic Tax Credits would be available for its restoration if sold for redevelopment. We shared this information with City of La Crosse leadership, and PAL also nominated Fire Station No. 4 to become a La Crosse Local Historic Landmark.

Locally we reached out to the La Crosse City Council, Mayor Kabat, City Planning Department and Logan Northside Neighborhood Association. Statewide we reached out to the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation, architect Roald Gundersen and other experts in the region, exploring every idea to save Fire Station No. 4 from demolition. On March 24, the City of La Crosse announced plans to re-evaluate the future of Fire Station No. 4. The La Crosse Heritage Preservation Commission unanimously designated Fire Station No. 4 a Local Historic Landmark on April 22 (which coincidentally was Earth Day). Now, the City Planning Department is creating a Request for Proposals from potential investors. Whatever Fire Station No. 4 becomes, we hope this North Side landmark will benefit the community and make residents proud.

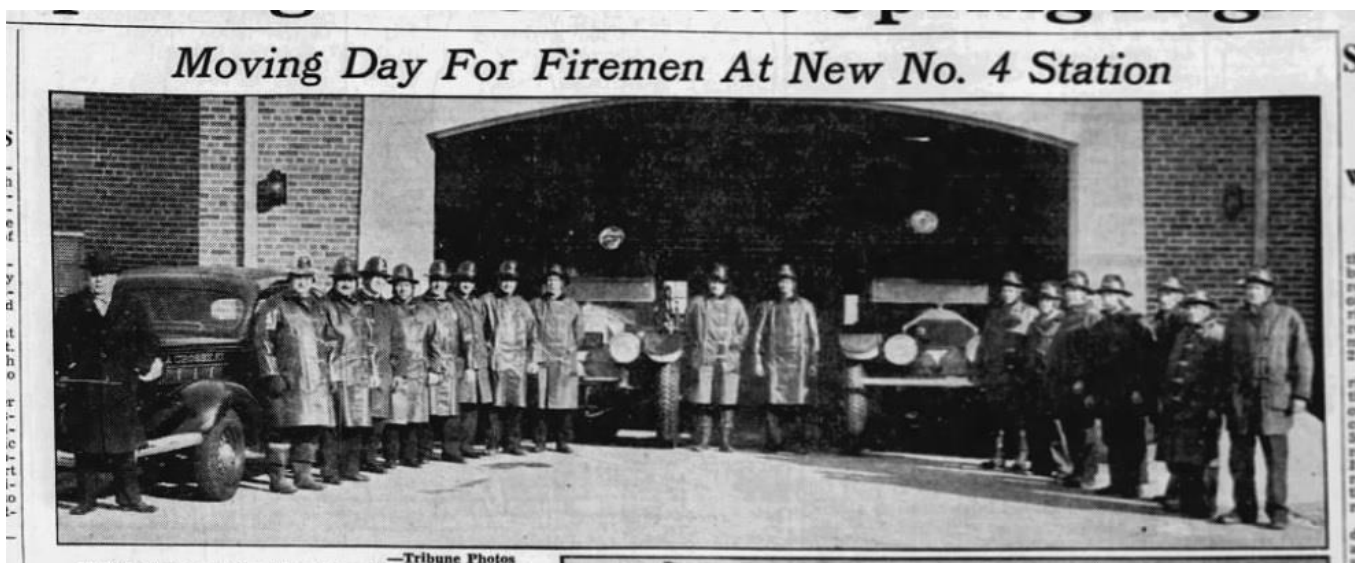
Why Fire Station No. 4 Matters... by David Riel



Fire Station No. 4. Source: La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, December 31, 1940.

Built in 1940, Fire Station No. 4 is the oldest operating fire station in the City of La Crosse. It was designed by Racine based architect J. Mandor Matson and built by the well-known La Crosse construction firm Peter Nelson and Son. Fire Station No. 4 is an eclectic/Tudor-style structure, built to blend in with the surrounding residential neighborhood, similar to the nearby North Side Public Library, which is also a La Crosse Local Historic Landmark.

The team that now inhabits Fire Station No. 4 can trace its roots back to 1893, when the volunteer company known as “Rescue Hose Company No. 4” was founded. Fire stations at that time were primarily designed to contain horse drawn sleighs or wagons, with stables where horses would feed and sleep, more closely resembling a barn than what we commonly think of today as a fire station. Fire Station No. 4 is significant as the first “modern” fire station, built after horse-drawn apparatus were retired in 1926, using features like an automatic overhead door and other modern inventions. Because it’s been in continuous use for 80 years, it has a high degree of integrity, still retaining original windows and doors, as well as the brass fire poles firefighters would slide down from the upper-level bedrooms to the apparatus room below.



Fire Station No. 4. Source: La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, February 21, 1941.

Historic Preservation Month

Here we are, over a year after we all went into lockdown due to the Covid pandemic. We are slowly peeking out of our shells, but many of us are doing so cautiously as well. Because a few months ago, we still were not sure of what our status would be by May, PAL did not plan any of our typical Historic Preservation Month activities such as the Heritage Preservation Awards. We hope to be back into full swing by next year!

However, we have not been idle! We've been continuing to meet, though through video chat software. We have been very busy the past several months with our efforts to save Fire Station #4 on La Crosse's north side from demolition (you can read about that elsewhere in this newsletter). And we've been keeping our eyes on other critically endangered buildings in La Crosse.

The Jehlen Building, built in 1886 at 119-121 Third St. S., is in the core of our historic downtown. People may remember it as Pizza Wagon, and more recently as Club Tucan. The building has seen better days, but it is important to the continuity of the historic streetscape, and we've learned that the owners want to demolish the building and have already received their demolition permit.

PAL, the City Planning Department and the Heritage Preservation Commission have all tried to find ways to prevent this pending demolition, however, the building was condemned for safety reasons (the roof is collapsing) and safety issues take precedence over historic issues.

So, we will likely lose this building. However, we are all invested in finding solutions so this kind of "demolition by neglect" scenario cannot happen again.... possibly through stronger inspections protocols, harsher fines for neglecting buildings, particularly that are designated as historic, and more accountability on the part of the owners. We can't save them all, but we can certainly make sure we aren't needlessly losing properties, either.

Barbara Kooiman

President of Preservation Alliance of La Crosse



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A Historic Garage In Its Own Right (Part 2) by David Riel



(In this edition, we continue our look at the new Ranum-Nelson House garage.)

Using special techniques to account for frigid temperatures, the concrete foundation was poured in December of 2019, and the construction of the garage began in January of 2020. Amy's uncle, Steve Mader, supervised the installation of the panels.

The walls, with pre-formed window and door openings, were secured together using metal brackets anchored in the concrete. The walls were assembled and completed in just a few hours.

A month or so later, trusses for the roof arrived...

Designed with a 5/12 pitch and a three-foot overhang, the new garage roof would mirror the low-pitched, Prairie Style roofline of the Ranum-Nelson House, while becoming its own unique addition to the architecture of the neighborhood.



Travis worked with carpenter Kjell Hatlevig to build the roof, using the same fascia and shingles found on the house, forming a visual bond between the old and the new. The 26 x 36-foot garage is exactly 17-feet-tall, which is the height limit for a structure like this. It also meets the maximum width allowed for the lot it occupies. In fact, the garage is larger than some single-family homes on the North Side, and has garnered quite a bit of attention since it first appeared on the scene.



In keeping with Prairie School motifs, horizontal bands of trim were added above the pebble-dash stucco. When painted, the bands will blend in with the concrete, a simple way to add architectural character and a historic feel to the exterior.

It was important to make the new garage look like it belonged with the historic home. Because the garage will also function as a workshop, they also wanted to make the garage as comfortable as possible.

The interior walls and ceiling were insulated with closed-cell spray foam, and insulated, divided-light windows were added to back of the garage.



Two 8-foot x16-foot garage doors with multi-light windows were made to fit the precast openings, and a pair of Prairie Style wall sconces were added to the façade.

The concrete walls with pebble-dash, the light fixtures and wide-overhanging eaves add character and create a historic feel despite being a thoroughly modern structure.

The Ranum-Nelson House garage is nearing completion, and all that remains is paint and landscaping. The next newsletter will include our third and final look at the finished work.



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