

**HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT**  
**CASS AND WELLS STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**I. Name**

Historic: Cass and Wells Streets Historic District

Common: Same

**II. Location**

Street Address: 712-724 (even) East Wells Street  
801-823 (odd) North Cass Street

Legal Property Description:

The boundaries of the Cass and Wells Streets Historic District are described as follows: Beginning at the intersection of North Cass Street and East Wells Street; then north along the west curb line of North Cass to the north property line of 823 North Cass; then west to the east line of the alley; then south to the north property line of 712 East Wells; then west to west property line of the same; then south to the north curb line of East Wells; then east to the point of beginning in the city of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

**III. Classification**

District

**IV. Owners**

Multiple

**V. Year Built**

1874 – 1922

**VI. Description**

**A. General Character**

The Cass and Wells Streets Historic District occupies about one quarter of one city block on Milwaukee's lower east side at the northwest corner of North Cass and East Wells Streets. The district is located in the former Yankee Hill neighborhood, an area that was once one of the city's most exclusive residential districts. The historic district contains eight freestanding residential scale buildings. There are six former single-family residences: one converted to a restaurant, two that are partially converted to offices, and three divided into apartments; one duplex apartment building, and one neighborhood grocery store with apartments above.

The district is distinguished from the surrounding area by its visual cohesiveness and by its difference in character. To the east of the district is a surface parking lot and an early twentieth-century, four-story apartment building, to the north and west are similar apartment buildings containing from 24 to 36 units each, and to the south is a modern parking garage. The district constitutes one of the few remaining clusters of the Victorian houses that once covered this part of the city.

Within the district there is a consistency in building scale, type and use. All buildings in the district are either two or two-and-one-half stories and are of similar height, width and bulk. The oldest buildings in the district are on Wells Street. They were built near the edge of the sidewalk with little or no front yard, only a modest strip of foundation plantings. The Henry Manshot House (# 2) (1874) and the Bridget Hutchinson House (# 4) (c. 1870) are examples of Italianate architecture. The Benjamin F. Parker House (# 1) (c. 1892), is a fine example of Queen Anne design. On Cass Street, an earlier generation of houses was replaced beginning in the mid-1890's with new houses. These residences were built with setbacks that permitted small front yards as well as foundation shrubbery. The Patrick Donnelly House (# 6) (1896) marked the transition in architectural style from the Queen Anne to the Colonial Revival. Next door, the Mrs. Willis Danforth House (# 7) (1897) used Elizabethan Revival elements while its northern neighbor, the Charles Danforth House (# 8) \*1904) exhibits Colonial Revival features.

B. Inventory of Buildings

The following inventory indicates the map number, street address, historic name, use (if known), and construction date (if known) of each building in the district. Dates of construction were determined by building permits, newspaper articles, fire insurance records, and tax records. Historic names and uses were determined by newspaper articles, social, business and commercial histories, city directories, fire insurance records and fire insurance maps.

**INVENTORY**

<u>Map #</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name/Use</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	712 E. Wells St.	Benjamin F. Parker House	c. 1892
2	718 E. Wells St.	Henry Manshot House	1874
3	724 E. Wells St.	Duplex	1914
4	801 N. Cass St.	Bridget Hutchinson House	c. 1870
5	809 N. Cass St.	Cherrier's Grocery	1922
6	815 N. Cass St.	Patrick Donnelly House	1896
7	819 N. Cass St.	Mrs. Willis Danforth House	1897
8	823 N. Cass St.	Charles Danforth House	1904

1	712 E. Wells St. Architect:	Benjamin F. Parker House Unknown	c. 1892
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The Benjamin F. Parker House is an excellent example of a cream brick Queen Anne style residence adapted to a small lot in a densely built urban neighborhood. Incorporated into its design is an arched entry and a bowed, shingle-clad balcony reminiscent of the Single Style unifying a shingled oriel window and a round, cortically roofed corner turret. These features give the small house a picturesque appearance, textural variety and geometric complexity typical of Queen Anne design. Parker was a former military man who was the secretary of the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin of the International Order of Good Templars from 1873 to 1900 and also International Secretary of the Order from 1885 to 1908. He lived in this house from 1892 until 1909 when he moved to Racine, where he died in 1912.

2	718 E. Wells St. <u>Architect:</u>	Henry Manschot House Charles A. Gombert	1874
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The Manschot House is an excellent example of an Italianate style residence. It is three bays wide, two stories high on a raised basement and has a low-hipped roof and bracketed cornice with a center pediment. It is constructed of cream brick with brick quoins at the corners of the main block. The windows have segmental tops with stone sills and hood molds inset with incised keystones. All masonry surfaces are painted green. The principal alterations include the replacement of the original main entry with the present Colonial style door and fanlight and the removal of the front porch in 1955.

Henry A. Manschot was a successful butcher with his shop on Market Square. He had succeeded to the ownership of Jacob Nunnemacher's butcher shop in the late 1860's after working there since the 1850s. His business eventually failed, and after the death of his wife he sold the house in 1891. In the 1920s, it was occupied by Francis E. McGovern after he finished his second term as Governor of Wisconsin.

3	724 E. Wells St. <u>Architect:</u>	Duplex F. W. Andree	1914
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This duplex is a two-story, flat-roofed, tapestry brick, early-twentieth century building of plain design. The only distinguishing feature of the building is the shallow bay window on the front and the simple boxed-out projecting cornice at the eaves lines. The front windows have been partially replaced with modern metal sliding units and the basements windows filled with pierced grilles of 1960s vintage. It was built as a rental property.

4	801 N. Cass St. Architect:	Bridget Hutchinson House Unknown	c. 1870
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This is a two-story, low-hip roofed, painted cream; "L" shaped Italianate house. The upper floor of the Cass Street elevation has arched windows with incised keystones, a projecting oriel ornamented with composition panels with garland swags, and a bracketed cornice. The window sash has been partially replaced with fixed, single-light units. The first floor front was remodeled into two storefronts in 1931. Both have small arched windows flanking an arched door. A separate entrance with a bracketed metal hood leading to the upstairs apartments separates the two storefronts. A molded wood cornice separates the storefront zone from the upper facade. The Wells Street elevation is of utilitarian design. Its principal feature is the oriel window on the second floor.

This house was moved to this site from an unknown location in 1896. It was the home of Mrs. Bridget Hutchinson, a widow who had lived in a wooden house on this site since at least 1847. Mrs. Hutchinson lived here until her death on December 13, 1899 at the age of 79. In the early twentieth century, the property was used as a duplex until 1931 when the first floor was remodeled for commercial use and the upper floor into apartments.

5	809 N. Cass St. <u>Architect:</u>	Cherrier's Grocery Unknown	1922
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This commercial building is a two-story, flat-roofed, tapestry brick early-twentieth century, commercial style building of simple, utilitarian design. The modern aluminum and glass storefront is surmounted by a pair of simple, paired wooden windows on the second floor. A rectangle of checkered brickwork enframed by a course of raised bricks ornamenting the parapet is the only decorative feature on the facade. The sides are painted, common brick. An asphalt, shingled-covered, wood oriel projects from the south side. Charles F. Cherrier who lived in the flat upstairs built it as a grocery store. Cherrier had operated a grocery store in an earlier building on the site since 1912.

6	815 N. Cass St. <u>Architect:</u>	Patrick Donnelly House Charles Fitzgerald	1896
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The Patrick Donnelly House illustrates the transition from the eclectic Queen Anne to the Colonial Revival style. It is a two and one-half story residence clad with cream colored brick. The house features Queen Anne-style massing and Colonial Revival-inspired porches, railings and cornice treatments. There appear to have been few major alterations to the exterior except for the rustic, modern shingling in the gable.

Patrick Donnelly was the principal of the Third District School. He lived here until his death at the age of 79 in 1915.

7	819 N. Cass St. <u>Architect:</u>	Mrs. Willis Danforth House Ferry & Clas	1897
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The Mrs. Willis Danforth House illustrates the emergence of the Elizabethan Revival style. It is a two-and-one-half story residence clad with cream colored pressed brick. The overall decoration of the house alludes to the Elizabethan period with its use of heavy molded window sash and the gable end treatment using elaborate half-timbering and stucco. There appear to have been no major alterations to the exterior.

8	823 N. Cass St. <u>Architect:</u>	Charles Danforth House Ferry & Clas	1904
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The Charles Danforth House is an example of Colonial Revival architecture. Indicative of the style is the gambrel roof that tops a two-and-one-half story block clad with russet pressed brick. The brick is laid to create splayed window lintels and keystones, and to enframe the Palladian window in the gable. The original porch posts and railing have been replaced with wrought iron, but the modillion cornice survives intact. Charles Danforth was a salesman.

## **VII. Significance**

The Cass and Wells Streets Historic District is architecturally significant for its fine nineteenth and early twentieth century residences. It is one of the last intact groupings of houses to survive from the exclusive Yankee Hill neighborhood that once covered almost 42 square blocks of the downtown. The quality of the materials and the craftsmanship displayed in these residences is reflective of the prominent Milwaukee architects including Charles Gombert, Charles Fitzgerald, F. W. Andree, George Bowman Ferry, and Alfred C. Clas who were commissioned to design them for their middle class clients.

## **VIII. Historic Background**

Milwaukee's early settlers from New York and New England established a residential area on the high ground east of the Milwaukee River and north of downtown. Referred to as Yankee Hill or "Yankeeberg by the German community, it was one of the choicest residential districts in the city during the nineteenth century, and soon some of the city's wealthiest German citizens chose to make it their home as well. Street grading and house construction began in the early 1840s. Historically, Yankee Hill comprised the area extending north from East Wisconsin Avenue to East Ogden Avenue, and east from Milwaukee Street to the lake. Today the last vestiges of this neighborhood lie within the area bounded by East Mason Street, North Van Buren Street, East Ogden Avenue, and Lake Michigan.

Yankee Hill was home to many of Milwaukee's pioneer civic, financial and business leaders. Its Yankee origins were reflected in street names taken from prominent political and financial figures of the day including Van Buren, Mason, Cass, Astor, and Marshall. After World War I the area began to decline in prestige as a single-family residential area as a result of the expansion of the business district as well as pressures for more intensive residential use. In response to the latter, numerous large residences were subdivided into apartments or rooming houses or were replaced by apartment buildings. It was during this period of increased population density that Cherrier's Grocery was built to provide groceries for the numerous apartment dwellers. In the 1950s, the city targeted the most deteriorated portions of Yankee Hill west of Van Buren Street for urban renewal and most of it was demolished to make way for new construction.

In its heyday from about 1870 to 1920, however, Yankee Hill was home to many of the city's most prominent citizens. Interspersed among the very grand houses of these families were the dignified residences of prosperous middle class professionals such as Patrick Donnelly and Benjamin F. Parker as well as small business entrepreneurs such as butcher Henry Manschot. The historic district is important for its representation of the middle class residential fabric that permeated Yankee Hill and provided the background context within which some of the city's most imposing homes were built.

Although in and of themselves, most of these buildings are fine examples of domestic architecture, their real significance lies in their combined impact as the last intact grouping of high quality middle class houses surviving from the Yankee Hill neighborhood to display such a wide range of architectural styles. The wonderfully varied streetscape is almost a catalogue of major domestic architectural styles popular in Yankee Hill from 1870-1914. The houses were products of some of the city's most prestigious architects, including Charles Gombert and Ferry and Clas, as well as the

works of lesser architects, such as Charles Fitzgerald, who carried on a predominantly domestic practice among the city's Irish community. These houses are a reminder of the high quality, limited budget designs such illustrious designers as Ferry and Clas and Gombert were capable of producing when not designing a major public building such as the Milwaukee Central Library or the North Point Water Tower. These lesser works preserve an important aspect of nineteenth century architectural practice: that designing small houses and commercial buildings was the bread-and-butter of most Milwaukee firms, and major commissions for churches, mansions, commercial blocks, and public buildings were the exception.

#### **IX. Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Cass and Wells Streets Historic District be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic District as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5, e-6 and e-8 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

## **X. Preservation Guidelines**

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

### **A. Guideline for Rehabilitation**

The Cass and Wells Streets Historic District is important because of its concentration of period residential buildings from the late nineteenth century. These guidelines are based upon those contained in Section 308-81(10) of the historic preservation ordinance. These guidelines are not intended to restrict an owner's use of his/her property, but to serve as a guide for making changes that will be sensitive to the architectural integrity of the structure and appropriate to the overall character of the district.

#### **1. Roofs**

Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. This includes parapets, pediments and cornices.

#### **2. Exterior Finishes**

##### **a. Masonry**

- i.** Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone and unpainted brick. This is likely to be historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- ii.** Consider retaining the paint on previously painted masonry surfaces. Removal of paint could cause irreversible damage if it is decided to remove the paint from masonry surfaces, use the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting or other abrasive cleaning methods are not permitted.
- iii.** Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- iv.** Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning

erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or marble.

- v. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial cast stone or fake brick veneer.

b. Wood and Metal

- i. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid the removal of architectural features that are an essential part of the building's character and appearance.
- ii. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed such as artificial stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles, vinyl or aluminum siding or composition panels.

c. Terra Cotta

- i. Unpainted terra cotta should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering naturally glazed or finished terra cotta. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- ii. Clean terra cotta only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method available. Sandblasting terra cotta is prohibited. This method of cleaning destroys the material.
- iii. Repair or replace deteriorated terra cotta with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Pre-cast tinted concrete or cast fiberglass are acceptable replacement materials as long as it is finished with a coating to resemble the original appearance. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or does not resemble the original.

3. Windows and Doors

- a. Retain original window and door openings that are visible from the public right-of-way. Retain the present configuration of panes,

sash, lintels, keystones, sills, architraves, pediments, hoods, doors, and hardware, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in the principal elevations by enlarging or reducing window or door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash. Avoid discarding original doors and door hardware when they can be repaired or reused.

- b. Respect the stylistic period or periods a building represents. If replacement of window sash or doors is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements such as unpainted aluminum storm and screen window combinations. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with materials like glass-block or the installation of fake shutters that are not in proportion to the openings or that are historically out of character with the building. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

#### 4. Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. The historic architectural fabric includes turned and carved wood trim, all terra cotta ornament, all pressed metal elements including the cornices, pediments and oriels, and all carved and cast stonework. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and material.

#### 5. Additions

Make additions that harmonize with the existing building architecturally and are located so as not be visible from the public right-of-way, if at all possible. Avoid making additions that are unsympathetic to the original structure and visually intrude upon the principal elevations.

#### 6. Non-Historic Additions

Alterations to non-historic portions of buildings shall be made in such a way as to be as sympathetic as possible to the historic building or neighboring buildings. If possible, alterations to these structures should seek to lessen the adverse impact of the non-historic addition or building on the historic components of the structure or district.

### B. Guidelines for Streetscapes

The visual character of the streetscapes in the district is maintained by the general consistency of the blockfaces in terms of height, scale, siting and density. This has resulted in a compact, cohesive building stock without intrusions that detract from the district's historic character.

1. Maintain the height, scale, mass and materials established by the buildings in the district and the traditional setback and density of the block faces. Avoid introducing elements that are incompatible in terms of siting, materials, height or scale.
2. Use traditional landscaping, fencing, signage, paving and street lighting that is compatible with the character and period of the district. Avoid introducing landscape features, fencing, street lighting or signage that are inappropriate to the character of the district.

#### C. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that additional new construction be designed so as to harmonize with the character of the district.

##### 1. Siting

New construction must reflect the traditional siting of buildings in the district. This includes setbacks, spacing between buildings, and the orientation of openings to the street and neighboring structures.

##### 2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration must be compatible with the surrounding structures.

##### 3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the surrounding buildings. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block must express the same continuity established by the historic structures.

##### 4. Materials

The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials traditionally used in the district. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

#### D. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission shall take the following guidelines, with that found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, into consideration when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building, or a portion thereof, is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of materials and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the district.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

6. Replacement

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is to be replaced by a compatible new building that would fulfill the same aesthetic function in the area as did the old structure (see New Construction Guidelines).

G. Fire Escapes

Additional required fire escapes and circulation towers shall be designed and located so as to minimize their visual impact from the public right-of-way.

H. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign other than those now in existence shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.