

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT
EAST SIDE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

I. NAME

Common: East Side Commercial Historic District

II. LOCATION

The East Side Commercial Historic District is located in the Milwaukee central business district on the east side of the Milwaukee River. It is located within the area bounded approximately by North Water Street, East Wisconsin Avenue, North Milwaukee Street and East Clybourn Street.

III. CLASSIFICATION

District

IV. OWNER

Multiple

V. YEAR BUILT

1854-1900

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

A. Boundaries

The East Side Commercial Historic District is bounded beginning at the intersection of East Wisconsin Avenue and North Milwaukee Street; then south along the west curb line of North Milwaukee Street to the north curb line of East Michigan Street; then west along said north curb line to the west curb line of North Broadway; then south along said west curb line to the north curb line of East Clybourn Street; then west along said north curb line to the east curb line of North Water Street; the north along said east curb line to the south curb line to the beginning point at the west curb line of North Milwaukee Street.

B. Architectural Character

The East Side Commercial Historic District includes three city blocks in Milwaukee's central business district east of the Milwaukee River. The district is comprised almost exclusively of mixed business uses. There are retail shops, restaurants, a variety of commercial service firms and numerous professional offices. The district is compactly built with many buildings of party-wall construction. There are forty-four buildings in the district. The architecturally and historically significant buildings in the district represent the major periods of commercial development in Milwaukee from 1850 to 1900. All of the buildings in the district are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The district is distinguished from its environs by its visual cohesiveness and by the change of character in the adjacent commercial areas. To the east of the historic district are some of the largest commercial buildings in downtown. These buildings, mostly modern, generally cover most of a city block and some rise thirty stories or more. They contrast with the low-rise, ornately detailed Victorian buildings in the district. Along the south boundary are expansive surface parking lots and the East-West Freeway. The elevated freeway is a dominant visual barrier that divides the district and the rest of downtown from the Historic Third Ward National Register Historic District. Large scale, high-rise office buildings also bound the district on the west and north. Surrounded as it is by modern buildings, surface parking lots and the freeway, the historic district comprises a distinctive enclave of low scale, Victorian buildings set within the larger context of the east side central business district.

Within the district, the wide range of building sizes, types and uses is the result of the successive generations of building that occurred on the east side. Milwaukee's commercial district developed as it did as a result of the original town settlement pattern of three independent villages: Juneautown east of the Milwaukee River, Kilbourntown west of the Milwaukee River and Walker's Point at the confluence of the Milwaukee and Menomonee Rivers. Upon the incorporation of the three villages as the city of Milwaukee in 1846, Juneautown and Kilbourntown emerged as the city's central business district. Today, the surviving buildings in the district reflect the differing commercial functions that distinguished the east from the west side commercial area. Banking and commodity trading were concentrated on the East Side on Michigan Street with extensive wholesale and commission offices on Water Street and Broadway. Professional and business offices were located on Broadway and Wisconsin Avenue. In contrast, the West Side became the city's major retailing and entertainment center.

There are three periods of commercial development represented in the district. The majority of the buildings from the earliest period (1854-1875) were built as small two- and three-story Italianate commercial structures with retail and service shops on the first floor and offices and manufacturing space above. Most are rectangular blocks with flat roofs, sometimes with gabled parapets. In the second period of development (1875-1890), four-to-ten-story office buildings, wholesale blocks and commission houses were built. In form, these range from the palatial banking and insurance blocks on Michigan Street to some of the long, narrow loft buildings on Water Street and Broadway. The last period of development (1890-1900) was characterized by the advent of the high rise loft industrial structure and office tower. Built to accommodate the increasing demand for office space in the central business district, these early, steel-framed skyscrapers range up to 12 stories tall. The McGeoch Building, 322 East Michigan Street, the Button Block, 500 North Water and the Railway Exchange Building, 229 East Wisconsin Avenue are typical examples.

The buildings in the district range in style from Italian Renaissance Revival to Italianate, Second Empire, Victorian Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Neo-Classical influenced Commercial Style. Some of the finest examples of each style are contained in the district. Some of the more outstanding structures listed in chronological order include:

514 North Water Street Eliphalet Cramer Building 1854

The four-story, two-bay commercial building was constructed in 1854 to the designs of pioneer architect George Mygatt for Eliphalet Cramer. It was built immediately after a fire in August of 1854 destroyed the previous building on the site. It was rented to a variety of tenants over the years. The building is in largely original condition except for the removal of a cornice molding and changes to the window sash and storefront. It is the second oldest known building in the central business district to survive intact. Originally it was part of a row of similar or identical buildings, but all of the others were altered later in the nineteenth century.

210 East Michigan	State Bank of Wisconsin/ Bank of Milwaukee	1856-57 1857-58
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Both the State Bank of Wisconsin and the Bank of Milwaukee were designed as local interpretations of the Italian Renaissance Revival Style. These two buildings along with the Iron Block at 205 East Wisconsin Avenue are the finest examples of this pre-Civil architectural style remaining in downtown Milwaukee. The State Bank is the more stylistically restrained of the two. It reflects the Roman-Tuscan mode, characterized by smooth wall surfaces that serve as a neutral backdrop for decorated window trim. The windows are capped with segmental and round arches. The mass of the building rests upon a heavily rusticated basement story and the central pavilion and segmental wings are defined with quoins. The building is crowned with a projecting cornice with a central pediment. It is faced with ashlar cream colored limestone. The design of the building is attributed to the pioneer architectural firm of George W. Mygatt and Leonard A. Schmidtner. Changes to the exterior include the rebuilding of the collapsed west wall in 1956 with buff colored brick. The cornice has been removed on this part of the building, as have the ornate window hoods on the Michigan Street façade. (NRHP-03/08/84).

The Bank of Milwaukee shows the richer texture of the North Italian mode although this might be the effect of the face being compressed into three narrow bays relative to the broader, six bay State Bank. The triple windows of the central bay, the exuberance of the extant carving and the heavily textured cornice reflect Venetian influences. The same cream colored limestone is used to face the building and for the ornate carvings. The architect of this building was Albert C. Nash. In 1903 the segmental cornice pediment was replaced with the current triangular one to create a uniform façade with the State Bank building. The Milwaukee architectural firm of George Bowman Ferry and Alfred C. Clas supervised the cornice remodeling. Also at this time the party wall between the two buildings was pierced to create a single banking room on the first floor. There appears to be little original interior fabric remaining in the State Bank and, except for three original marble fireplace mantels, only scattered fragments in the Bank of Milwaukee.

205 E. Wisconsin Ave.	Iron Block	1860
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The Iron Block is Milwaukee's only remaining cast iron façade building. Like the State Bank and the Bank of Milwaukee buildings, it is designated in the Italian Renaissance Revival Style. The building was designed by George H. Johnson, manager of the architectural department of Daniel Badger's Architectural Iron Works in New York City. The facades are articulated in the North Italian mode with rusticated wall surfaces punctuated by a series of round arched windows. The corners and piers are outlined with vermiculated blocks and lion heads enrich the belt course and cornice lines. In 1899 the building was enlarged with a four bay wide addition to the south. It was

constructed of cream brick, but was designed to harmonize with the original building. The rusticated piers and cornice design was carried through in the addition. On the ground floor and mezzanine are retail shops, while offices occupy the upper three floors. In 1984 an intensive restoration of the building was undertaken returning the exterior to nearly its original appearance. The interior was completely refurbished for the shops and offices that now occupy the building (NRHP 12-27-74)

600-628 N. Broadway Lawrence Block 1868

The Lawrence Block in a seven bay, Italianate Style, commercial block built by a group of investors headed by Jabez Lawrence in 1868. The original building was a mansard-roofed, four-story, speculative, retail and loft-manufacturing structure with seven storefronts and three floors of offices and manufacturing space above. It was built at a time when Broadway (then know as Main Street) was becoming a commercially important extension of the city's main retailing area on North Water Street. The Birchard and Follansbee Block (323-31 East Wisconsin Avenue) and the Noonan Block (307 East Wisconsin Avenue), which had been built the previous year, had encouraged the further commercialization of this block of Broadway. The whole building was occupied by a variety of tenants including commission merchants, express companies, crockery merchants, but most numerous by garment manufacturers and milliners. North 602 had the mansard roof removed and a full fourth story added in the 1890's. In 1935 the present tile front was put on North 618-624 destroying its architectural significance.

630 North Broadway Pfister's Building 1872

Pfister's Building is an Italianate style commercial building. Four stories in height, it is constructed of cream brick with a deep, bracketed, pressed metal cornice. The façade is articulated by heavy piers and round-arched windows.

636 North Water Street Commercial Building c.1875

This structure is a three bay, three-story Italianate commercial building. Typical of the period, it was constructed of cream brick with limestone trim and a pressed metal cornice. The masonry on the upper floors has been recently cleaned and returned to its original appearance.

207 East Michigan Street Mitchell Building 1876-78

The Mitchell Building is Milwaukee's finest example of a high style, French Second Empire Style commercial building. A five-story rectangular edifice, the lower walls are faced with deep gray Minnesota granite and the upper walls with limestone. A mansard roof with dormers encloses the fifth story. A mansard roof tower rises above the center of the Michigan Street façade. The facades are elaborately decorated with carved stone window pediments, denticulated belt courses and sculptured figures. Eminent Milwaukee architect Edward Townsend Mix designed the building for entrepreneur and businessman, Alexander Mitchell. This building housed Mitchell's business enterprises including the Wisconsin Marine and Fire Insurance Company Bank; predecessor of today's Marine National Bank, the Northwestern National Insurance Company and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. Only traces of the original interiors remain, but the exterior has been little altered (NRHP-04/03/73).

The former Chamber of Commerce Building, now called the Mackie Building, lies directly east of the Mitchell Building. It was built to accommodate the grain exchange (a commodity trading room) and the offices of the Chamber of Commerce. It complements the Mitchell Building in scale, mass, materials and architectural grandeur. The five-story edifice is constructed of granite, limestone and trimmed with sandstone. The facades are richly carved and incised in the rectilinear High Italianate commercial style. The fifth floor is enclosed with a low pitch mansard roof with dormers. From the center of the Michigan Street façade rises a soaring clock tower topped by a cupola. Edward Townsend Mix was also commissioned to design this building for Alexander Mitchell, who built this as an investment property and leased it to the Chamber of Commerce.

The exterior of the building has remained largely intact with few alterations. The interior contains the sumptuous, three-story, grain exchange trading room that contained a sunken, tiered trading pit modeled after the one in the previous Chamber of Commerce Building. This original pit was presumed to have been the first one ever constructed. The trading room remained intact until after World War II when it was subdivided for office use. From 1981 to 1983 an intensive restoration of the trading room was undertaken by the owners to recreate one of the Midwest's most magnificent historic interiors. The ceiling and walls were originally adorned with frescoes, murals and wall paintings commissioned by local artists. Built for grain trading purposes, this early stock exchange room is divided into three sections by a series of colossal faux-marble columns with gilded Corinthian-like capitals incorporating steamship and locomotive motifs. The themes of industry, agriculture, transportation, trade and commerce were repeated throughout the room's décor. At the center of the ceiling is a skylight surrounded by frescoes of wheat sheave medallions encircled by Wisconsin wild flowers. These were done by the Chicago fresco artist "Armini" who did the remaining ceiling treatments including the allegorical four seasons paintings at the corners and depictions of the Milwaukee Water Works, the Bay View Rollings Mills and the Wisconsin State Seal at the east and west ends of the room. The Canvas mural above the room's entrance was commissioned from local artist, John S. Conway. It depicts an allegorical scene of industry, agriculture and commerce with mythological figures harvesting grain, forging iron and gathered around a stock-ticker. The mural is the largest single piece of artwork in the room measuring 24 feet long by 10 feet wide. Below this, flanking the main entrance are two large wall paintings. The one to the east of the door depicts shipping and the one to the west depicts agriculture.

When grain trading ceased at this site in 1935, the room was little used. After World War II, the room was extensively altered when the lower part was subdivided into offices. The two-story space above the false ceilings that were erected was allowed to severely deteriorate. The room was accurately restored in 1982-83 and all of the missing architectural features were reproduced except for the long-vanished trading pit. The Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin, Wisconsin recreated the new ceiling frescoes. Because the tie wires of the suspended ceiling had caused irreparable damage to them, photographs were taken, tracings made and over 140 colors recorded. The ceilings were replastered and spray-painted with a base coat and the tracings repainted in the original colors. The original wall paintings flanking the main entrance were unsalvageable and Sheboygan artist, Father Richard Fale, was commissioned to copy them. He also reproduced a third painting of a group of American Indians camped at the edge of a cornfield. The only original artwork to

survive intact was Conway's mural. It required only cleaning and touch-up painting. With the recreation of missing plasterwork, woodwork, faux-marbling and other features, the Grain Exchange Room has been restored to nearly its original appearance as ascertained from period photographs. It is one of the outstanding mural-ornamented Victorian commercial interiors in America. (NRHP - 04/03/73).

532 North Water Street Commercial Building c.1875

This four-story commercial building was constructed in 1854 after a fire destroyed an earlier building on the site. It was originally an Italianate commercial building similar to North 514, but was drastically remodeled when the present stone facade was added in 1875. It is a fine example of carved limestone Victorian commercial facade even though its cornice has been removed.

510 North Water Street Holton Block 1880

The Holton Block was built in 1854 to the designs of pioneer architect George Mygatt as part of the rebuilding of this portion of North Water Street after the disastrous fire of August 24, 1854, which destroyed all of the buildings north of Clybourn Street. Originally virtually identical to North 514, it was completely rebuilt in 1880 after real estate investor Edward Holton acquired the two structures on the site and remodeled them for Henry Neidecken & Company. The Neidecken Company was a major dealer in paper goods and blank books. The \$7,500 rebuilding, which was extensively documented in the newspapers during the summer and fall of 1880, included the construction of the present stone facade and the addition of the fourth story. The Neidecken Company occupied the building from 1881 to 1896.

611 North Broadway 611 North Broadway Building 1885-86

The 611 North Broadway Building was built as the third corporate headquarters of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. The nation's tenth largest insurer is now located in its fourth and present building at 720 East Wisconsin Avenue. Solon Spencer Beman of Chicago was the architect commissioned to design what is now one of Milwaukee's premier examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The massive office building has a raised basement and ground story constructed of Maine granite, about which rise four stories faced with rock-faced Indiana limestone. The facades are articulated by arcaded openings divided by stone piers that terminate in clusters of colonettes with foliated stone capitals. A stone parapet crowns the entire composition. On the inside a grand open staircase with marble steps, cast-iron railings and copper trimmed newel posts rises in a four-story atrium with an arched cast iron skylight. This light court retains its original architectural features and patterned encaustic tile floor. (NRHP-3/20/73)

624 North Water Street Zimmerman Brothers 1886

The Zimmermann Brothers Clothing Company is a three-bay, five-story, loft-retail type commercial building designed in the Queen Anne style. The triple windows are articulated with cast iron columns on the third floor and by brick piers trimmed with terra cotta on the fourth and fifth floors. The exterior of this building was cleaned and the remaining original fabric restored to nearly its original appearance in 1982.

500 North Water Button Block 1892

The Button Block is a seven-story Romanesque Revival style commercial building. The architects were the Milwaukee firm of Crane and Barkhausen. The first two floors are constructed of dark red, rock-faced sandstone and the upper floors clad with dark red pressed brick trimmed with sandstone and terra cotta. At the southwest corner is a seven-story turret with conical roof that is supported by a granite column with a Romanesque capital. The exterior of this structure is in nearly original condition, except for modifications to the storefronts at the ground floor level.

628 North Water Street Commercial Building 1893/1908/1918

This building was originally an elaborate Victorian Italianate commercial building built in the 1870's. In 1893 the façade was completely rebuilt in the Neo-Classical Commercial style to the designs of James Douglas. All that remains from this remodeling is the tan pressed brick and terra cotta third floor. The lower two floors were remodeled again in 1908 and 1918 with expansive, plate glass show case windows. In 1984 the upper floor was cleaned and refurbished and the lower two floors were returned to an approximation of their 1918 appearance.

322 East Michigan Street McGeoch Building 1894

The McGeoch Building is a six-story, Neo-Classical Commercial style former printing house designed by Milwaukee architects H. Paul Schnetzky and Eugene R. Liebert. It was one of the first large buildings in downtown Milwaukee to use steel frame construction. The ground floor piers are faced with banded rusticated limestone with terra cotta Corinthian capitals. The upper floors are clad with tan pressed brick and trimmed with limestone and terra cotta. At the eaves is a denticulated sheet metal cornice. The exterior has recently been restored and the ironstone fronts, steps and railings have been restored.

233 East Wisconsin Avenue Railway Exchange Building 1899-1900

The Railway Exchange Building was Milwaukee's first high rise steel frame office building. Its architect, William LeBaron Jenney of Chicago, is considered by many to be the father of the modern skyscraper. It is a traditional Commercial Style building, twelve stories high with Neo-Classical ornament. The first three floors are faced with banded terra cotta and the upper floors are clad in dark red pressed brick. The elaborate cornice has been removed and replaced with a plain brick parapet, but the Neo-Classical ornament that enlivens the upper three floors remains.

Other buildings in the district include:

511 N. Broadway	Wholesale house	c. 1867
	1870-1928, H. Stern & Bro.,	
	wh. dry goods	
	1869-1870, Stein & Mendel,	
	wh. hats & caps	
	1871-1874, M & L Stein,	
	wh. hats & caps	
	1875-1879, Charles Stein & Co.	
	wh. hats & caps.	

525-27 N. Broadway	Gunnison's Building 1874-1977, M. Landauer & Co., retail goods	1873
529-31 N. Broadway	Commercial building	pre. 1876
625-29 N. Broadway	Commercial building	undetermined
625 N. Milwaukee	Pioneer Building	1864-65/1925
627 N. Milwaukee	Diefendorf's Building 1869-76, Wm. A. Munn, tin shop 1872-74, <u>Christian Statesmen</u> Newspaper	1867
631 N. Milwaukee	Diefendorf's Building	1867
633 N. Milwaukee	Commercial building	1870
516 N. Water St.	Wholesale house 1867-1871 C.J. Dewey, wh. crocery 1872-78 Cohen Bros. & Co., wh. clothing	1854/c.1870
522 N. Water St.	Wholesale house 1867-69, Wadsworth, Adams & Co., wh. grocers 1872-75, Otto D. Bjorkquist, who. boots & shoes 1877-84, C.H. Hamilton & Co., wh. paper dealers	1854/c.1870
525 N. Water St.	Wholesale house 1865-69, Hugo Mack, wh. dry good 1872-77, Kirby, Newbre & Co. yankee notions 1880-91, Meinecke & Co., wh. toys, fancy goods	c. 1854/1911
530 N. Water St.	Office building	1946
610 N. Water St.	Office building	1964
622 N. Water St.	Office Building	1963-66
632-34 N. Water St.	Commercial building	1928/1970
219-27 E. Wisconsin Ave.	Retail shop	Undetermined

307 E. Wisconsin Ave.	Noonan Block Commercial building	1867/1871
323-331 E. Wisconsin Ave.	Birchard & Follansbee's Block	1867/1899/1906

VII. Significance

The East Side Commercial Historic District contains an architecturally and historically significant collection of commercial buildings constructed between 1854 and 1900. The district illustrates Milwaukee's commercial development from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the century. Within the district are outstanding examples of Italianate, Italian Renaissance Revival, Second Empire, Romanesque and Neo-Classical influenced Commercial Style commercial architecture. The works of both locally and nationally important architects are represented including Milwaukeeans, Albert C. Nash, Edward Townsend Mix, the firms of George W. Mygatt and Leonard A. Schmidtner, as well as Chicago's Solon Spencer Beaman and William LeBaron Jenny. Historically, the district represents significant contributions to the development of Milwaukee in the area of commerce, most notably banking, commission trading, insurance and wholesaling.

VIII. Historical Background

Milwaukee's commercial history began with the first town settlement in 1835. Prior to this, extensive commercial trade had been carried on between French Canadian traders and the Indians at this location, but little permanent construction had resulted. In Wisconsin, sites on Lake Michigan were favored locations for trade with the Indians. Throughout the 18th century various fur trading posts had been established in the Milwaukee area along the river estuaries, but none of these had resulted in permanent settlement. Jacques Vieau was one of an early group of fur traders who had established a major trading center at Green Bay. In 1795 he came to Milwaukee and established a seasonal post on a knoll overlooking the Menomonee River in present day Mitchell Park. Vieau divided his time between his two posts and was not a permanent resident of the Milwaukee area. In 1818 a young French Canadian, Solomon Juneau, came to Milwaukee to work as a clerk for Vieau. Juneau married Vieau's daughter, Josette, in 1820 and assumed control of the business within a couple of years. Juneau is considered by most accounts to have been the first permanent settler of Milwaukee. He built his cabin in 1822 at what is now the northwest corner of North Water Street and East Wisconsin Avenue. Juneau remained at this site year round where he operated a trading post in a separate building. Permanent settlement of any kind in the region was inhibited by Indian control of southeastern Wisconsin. Treaties with the Indians in 1831 and 1833 ceded this part of the state to the federal government. Almost immediately after the land was surveyed and put up for sale, European and Yankee settlement began in earnest.

Milwaukee's topography influenced the physical and political character of the early settlement. The Milwaukee and Menomonee Rivers divided the area into three sections: east, west and south. By 1835 when the Indian lands had been surveyed and were ready for public sale, a handful of promoters already claimed the lands that comprised the original nucleus of Milwaukee. Morgan L. Martin, in partnership with Solomon Juneau, staked out the eastern wedge between the lake and the Milwaukee River as a town site. This is where the historic district is located. Byron Kilbourn, an Ohio engineer and surveyor, chose land on the west side of the Milwaukee River. The third developer, George H. Walker, established his claim south of the Milwaukee River on a peninsula that became known as Walker's Point (listed in the NRHP 12/19/78). Thus, Milwaukee's development began as three separate speculative real estate ventures. Rivalry between the original town-makers, induced by the speculative

origins of the towns and fostered by the existence of the river barrier, characterized Milwaukee from the beginning.

The 1830's were the heyday of land speculation and townsite promotion in the territory between the Allegheny Mountains and the Mississippi River. In Milwaukee, this not only produced competing settlements, but also influenced the original layout of the village. In 1835 Kilbourn and Juneau filed their respective plats for the west and east sides. Both plats followed the gridiron plan of repetitive rectangular blocks, which was the most common layout of western towns during the nineteenth century. This plan facilitated land survey, lot subdivision, and sales. Its uniformity appealed to promoters and prospective buyers alike. Both the Kilbourn and Juneau plats, however, shared the typical failing of the gridiron plan: they disregarded topography. The plats preserved the straight line and the right angle at the expense of the natural lay of the land and the individual features of the site. The only deviation in Milwaukee's checkerboard street pattern was East Water Street (today's North Water Street) and North Water Street (now a part of Plankinton Avenue), which paralleled the crooked course of the Milwaukee River. Several randomly placed public squares were also included in both plats. Because of competition between Juneau and Kilbourn, however, the east-west streets of the two plats did not align and were given different names.

Despite its formal gridiron plan, Milwaukee at this time was a small frontier village of scattered buildings. Writing in the early 1840s Lapham described some of the site's features:

The city commences about a mile above the mouth of the river, at a place called Walker's Point, and extends about a mile and a half along the river. Below Walker's Point, the river is bordered by impassable marshes. The ground occupied by the town is uneven, rising from the river from fifty to one hundred feet, thus affording very beautiful stations for residences, commanding a full view of the town and bay, with its shipping. But few of these sites have yet been occupied and improved, as their peculiar importance and interesting views would lead us to suspect.

Throughout the small riverfront community, radical alterations of the terrain had begun by the 1840s. Hills and bluffs were removed or graded, eliminating, no doubt, some of the commanding views, and the remaining soil was used to fill in the extensive marshes and lowlands along the river banks. The local promoters, chiefly Byron Kilbourn, financed these and other costly improvements and Solomon Juneau to entice settlers to their respective town sites. By 1837, Kilbourn had spent about thirteen thousand dollars for the construction of roads and streets. Today the topography is so altered from its original state that it is difficult to conceive of the original irregular terrain with its bluffs, ravines and swamps.

In Juneautown, on the east side of the river, most of the original buildings clustered along Water Street near the intersections of Michigan Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Kilbourntown, on the west side, was centered at the corner of Third Street and Juneau Avenue. Among the earliest structures built were log cabins and "claim shanties," built by driving stakes into the ground and surrounding them with basswood lumber. Most were modest structures, one-to three-stories high. The early town consisted of a random jumble of dwellings, stores, taverns, sawmills and shops belonging to blacksmiths, cooper, and other tradesmen.

Most of the dwellings were little more than flimsy wood shells often made to look more substantial by the addition of a false front. As early as 1846, however, the first two brick houses were built of locally made cream brick, a building material for which Milwaukee would later become famous. The first brick store block was erected in 1840 at the northwest corner

of Third and Juneau Streets. It was three stories high, and housed the first theater in Milwaukee. None of these buildings remain today.

Approaching Milwaukee in 1840, one would have seen a skyline dominated by the first courthouse and the newly erected St. Peter's Catholic Church (not extant). The courthouse, built in 1836, faced south on Cathedral Square (then called Juneau Square). The dignified, Greek Revival Style, two-story building, fifty-one feet long and forty-two feet wide featured a pediment portico supported by four Tuscan columns (not extant). The church stood off by itself on Juneau Avenue west of Jackson Street. A new wooden bridge spanning the Milwaukee River at Juneau Avenue was also erected at this time. Built in 1840, the bridge was the first to connect the two rival settlements on either side of the river. Prior to that, settlers relied on ferries.

Between 1835 and 1840, the population of Milwaukee expanded from 125 to 1,692. Although the majorities were Yankees from New York State and New England, Milwaukee's population was ethnically diverse from the beginning. The first groups of British, German, Irish, and Norwegian immigrants started arriving before 1840. The first Black settler, Joe Oliver, who worked for Solomon Juneau was a cook, arrived in 1835.

As the pioneer trading post gave way to a permanent settlement with improved streets and waterways, the growing population demanded businesses that could provide goods and services. On both sides of the river offices and shops were built - land offices and lawyers' offices, liverys and blacksmiths, hotels and taverns, and stores that sold everything from salt to books. Commercial activity on the east side was chronicled by historian James Buck on 1836 who noted every business and dwelling along the four blocks of North Water, Broadway and Milwaukee Streets between Buffalo Street and East Wisconsin Avenue. Water Street is the oldest street in the city and the two blocks of it between Wisconsin Avenue and East Clybourn Street were the first to be graded by Solomon Juneau in 1834. Wisconsin Avenue was also graded the same year for five blocks east from the river to present day North Jackson Street. Water Street, and to a lesser extent Broadway, Michigan Street, Clybourn Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue, became the hub of commercial activity on the east side. Water Street's ready access to the Milwaukee River made it the primary business thoroughfare on the east side and the principal commercial center of the three villages.

The first shops and dwellings that lined Water Street were simple one and two story, gabled buildings of frame construction. Often the merchant would live above his store or beside it in a dwelling that was similar in appearance to his shop. None of these early buildings survive today. Clybourn Street also became a major early commercial street, but quickly faded in importance in the 1860s. In 1842 and 1843, the first piers extending into Lake Michigan were built at the east end of Clybourn. It soon became the east-west commercial artery for bringing goods into the city from Lake Michigan. Wisconsin Avenue was not a major commercial street during this early period. As far east as Broadway, Wisconsin Avenue was developed with commercial uses similar to those on Water, but east of Broadway the street was residential.

Although incorporated as a city in 1846, Milwaukee was still actually three independent villages only slightly connected together, because of the barrier posed by the river and the lingering speculative rivalries of the 1830s. In the 1850s, however, commercial activity expanded on a large scale as Milwaukee grew into a major regional center. From 1853 to 1857 the business community doubled in physical size and wealth, as did the city's population. Eight plank roads radiated into the hinterland facilitating the transport of agricultural products to the port and the city was connected by railroads to Chicago in 1855 and to the Mississippi River in 1857. By the late 1850's, Milwaukee had emerged as a city. On the east side,

residential and commercial uses had largely separated into their own distinct neighborhoods and a defined central business district had formed. Water Street south of Wisconsin Avenue emerged as the wholesaling center of the city with three and four story, masonry, loft buildings lining both sides of the street from the bend in the Milwaukee River north to Wisconsin Avenue. Offices and sales departments would be located on the ground floors. Typical of these early buildings is Eliphalet Cramer's building at 514 North Water Street built in 1854. A number of hotels and some retail shops, mostly holdovers from the previous decades, were also located along the street. During this period, Michigan Street between the Milwaukee River and Broadway emerged as the city's financial district. Alexander Mitchell erected his Marine Bank building in 1846 on the southwest corner of North Water and East Michigan Streets. This was later the site of the Mitchell Building erected in 1877. Across the street, the Bank of Milwaukee was built in 1856-57 and the State Bank of Wisconsin was built in 1857-58. The erection of the Chamber of Commerce Building (Mackie Building) in 1879 and the Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company corporate headquarters (611 North Broadway Building) in 1886 solidified Michigan Street as the city's Victorian era center of finance and commerce.

Wisconsin Avenue did not emerge as a commercial street of importance to rival Water and Michigan Streets until the 1860s. Fires in 1860 and 1865 destroyed virtually all of the frame buildings on the south side of Wisconsin Avenue between Water Street and Milwaukee Street. The ensuing new construction transformed Wisconsin Avenue into a major commercial artery. Substantial business blocks for retail shops and professional offices erected in the 1860s included the Noonan Block (1867) at 307 East Wisconsin. New commercial development also occurred on the cross streets expanding and further solidifying the east side business district. South of Wisconsin Avenue on Broadway the half block long Lawrence Building (1868) at 602-628 Broadway provided professional offices, mostly occupied by commission merchants and manufacturing space for numerous milliners.

In the period from 1870 to 1900 Milwaukee became a highly diversified city. Its economic base had broadened from the processing of the region's agricultural products to include large-scale heavy industry. Between 1850 and 1880 the major processing industries were flour milling, meat packing, tanning, brewing and boot and shoe making. Until 1880, Milwaukee's primary economic activity was the trade and export of these goods. In 1865 the city emerged as the world's largest wheat exporter and remained a dominant influence in this area of trade for the next fifteen years. The first significant heavy industry was established in the late 1860s when the Milwaukee Iron Company constructed the Bay View Rolling Mill at the lakeshore on the city's southern border. Milwaukee's location near regional iron ore supplies and marketing routes spurred the development of heavy industry. A post Civil War immigration of Germans, Poles and Eastern Europeans swelled the city's population from 71,440 in 1870 to 285,315 by 1900. These people provided the massive labor needed by the expanding foundries, metal fabricating and heavy machinery plants.

The change in economic focus from processing agricultural products to heavy manufacturing led to the expansion of established businesses. Banking, insurance, commission trading and wholesaling all required new buildings to accommodate the increasing scale of business activity as nationwide markets opened up. There was also a need for more professional office space. The older portions of Water Street, Wisconsin Avenue and Broadway were rebuilt with opulent commercial and office blocks that reflected the enormous wealth accumulated in this period. The Mitchell Bank Building (1876), at 207 East Michigan Street, the Chamber of Commerce Building (1879) (now Mackie Building) at 225 East Michigan Street and the former Northwest Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (611 North Broadway Building) (1886) at 611 Broadway are excellent examples from this boom period of growth. A good example of

the luxurious commercial blocks built or remodeled at this time is Holton's Block at 510 North Water Street.

Toward the end of the 19th century, new buildings to house corporate headquarters, professional offices and loft industries were still very much needed. Important buildings constructed at this time included the Railway Exchange Building (1899-1900) at 233 East Wisconsin Avenue, the McGeoch Building (1894) at 322 East Michigan Street and the Button Block (1892) at 500 North Water Street.

This district has experienced little change since 1900 except for spot demolition and remodelings. Numerous buildings have experienced storefront and entrance remodelings and the loss of their cornices. A few new buildings have been constructed including 530, 610 and 622 North Water Street.

IX. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the East Side Commercial Historic District be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic District as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-3, e-5, e-6 and e-7 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 301-81(2)(e).

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 decision based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the East Side Commercial Historic District. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Guidelines for Rehabilitation

The East Side Commercial Historic District is important because of its concentration of period commercial buildings from the late 19th 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) Retain painted masonry surfaces. Removal of paint could cause irreversible damage to the masonry. If it is decided to remove the paint from masonry surfaces, use the gentlest method possible.
- (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

- (i) Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid the removal of architectural features that are in most cases 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, architrave's, 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 galvanized 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 buildings. Avoid using modern 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 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 to 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/Non-Historic Structures

Alterations to non-historic buildings or 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 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 block faces in terms of height, scale, siting and density. This has resulted in a compact, cohesive building stock with few 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 are 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 building, 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 those 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 material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structure 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 affect 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 district as did the old structure (See New Construction Guidelines).

F. 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.

G. 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.