

HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDY REPORT

KENWOOD MASONIC TEMPLE (Written Summer 1990)

I. NAME

Historic: Kenwood Masonic Temple

Common: Italian Community Center

II. LOCATION

2648 North Hackett Avenue

Tax Key Number: 318-0185-000

Legal Description: GILMAN'S SUBD ETC IN SE ¼ SEC 15-7-22 VOL 4 PAGE 27 BLOCK 5 LOT 23

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Italian Community Center, Inc.
2648 North Hackett Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Attention: Mr. Phillip Purpero, Executive Director

V. YEAR BUILT

1915-16

Architect: Leenhouts & Guthrie, Architects

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The former Kenwood Masonic Temple is located in a middle-class residential area of substantial single-family houses on the upper east side of Milwaukee. It is sited on a 58 x 150 foot lot on a street of early 1900's apartment buildings and row houses adjacent to a two-block-long neighborhood commercial strip. A large vacant lot separates it from an early 1900's stone, English Parish Gothic Style church to the south. The building occupies virtually its entire lot except for a shallow grassy front lawn ornamented with some foundation plantings next to the building.

The former Kenwood Masonic Temple was built in 1915-16. It is a rectangular, brown tapestry brick, three-story, flat-roofed, Venetian Gothic-style structure set on a high basement. It has an elaborate façade treatment facing west to Hackett Avenue while the other three elevations are of utilitarian design with little or nothing in the way of architectural enrichment. It is, in fact, only the treatment of the west elevation that makes the building architecturally significant.

The design of the west elevation is composed of elements drawn from several famous fifteenth century late Gothic-style Venetian palaces. The first two levels of the five-bay, three-story façade are composed of a three-bay central section containing the elaborately enframed two-level loggia flanked on each story by one bay of paired Gothic lancet-arched windows. The first story of the south bay contains the double-leaf entrance doors, set at sidewalk level, with their wooden Gothic sidelights and transom surmounted by a massive terra-cotta pediment ornamented with Gothic motifs. All of the fenestration is enframed in molded cream-colored terra cotta in the Venetian Gothic style. The paired, wooden, lancet-arched, casement windows are glazed in a leaded diagonal lattice pattern. The loggia is composed of a flat, outer enframing of terra cotta incised with a shallow geometric pattern surmounted by a modillion cornice. Within this enframing is set an ornate Gothic column screen with intricate pierced quatrefoil spandrels. The loggia balustrade is also terra cotta. Recessed within the shallow loggia is a fully glazed wooden curtain wall of diagonally latticed leaded casement windows and French doors.

The third story is fenestrated with five, pointed Gothic casement windows with bold terra cotta enframements. The two end windows, which are taller than the central windows, are paired casement windows with a quatrefoil light in the spandrel. They are identical in design to the second story windows except that they are shorter. The three windows over the loggia consist of a triple-arched central casement grouping flanked by paired units. The enframements of these windows are simpler in design than the end windows. An ornate terra cotta modillion cornice defines the eaves line above which rises a plain brick parapet wall with a simple terra cotta coping. The cornice terminates just beyond the corner of the building and does not continue across the side elevations.

The south elevation is highly visible, but was evidently designed with the expectation that another large structure would be built up against it to obscure it from view. It is a plain brick wall over one hundred feet long and a full four stories tall virtually devoid of embellishment. The sparse fenestration is located to respond to floor plan requirements. Five bays of large, arched, Gothic style sash on the first floor are the only features of any architectural interest. Most of the other windows are small, plain, one-light, square sash. At the east end, a stair tower rises above the parapet. It has a door in the base grade level surmounted by three small, two-over-two, double-hung windows located at mid-story levels to light the stair landings.

The north elevation is similar in composition to the south elevation, but lacks the stair tower. It is largely obscured from view by the tall block of row houses that fills the adjacent lot to the north.

The east or rear elevation is sited about ten feet back from the rear lot line. It is as plain as the side elevations with only a few small, double-hung, wooden windows randomly sprinkled across it.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The former Kenwood Masonic Temple is architecturally significant as a unique local example of Venetian gothic period revival architecture. It is important as a fine example of the exotic historical revival architecture adopted by the Masons in the early twentieth century to distinguish their lodge halls from those of other fraternal orders and to reflect the origins of their organization in the building trade guilds of medieval Europe.

VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

History of the Kenwood Lodge

As did other fraternal organizations, Freemasonry grew rapidly in popularity in the early 1900's. As it became less convenient to attend meetings in the old Masonic lodges downtown, numerous neighborhood lodges were established that were closer to their members' homes. The agitation to establish a lodge on the upper east side resulted in the founding of the Kenwood Masonic Lodge No. 303 in 1913. Curiously, the lodge was named after Kenwood Boulevard; a fashionable residential street located in the heart of the area the new lodge was established to serve, even though the lodge was never located on Kenwood Boulevard. Organizational meetings were held at several east side locations including Williams Thompson's drug store, located on the corner of North Oakland Avenue and East Locust Street and at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

After the lodge was legally constituted by the Grand Lodge, Kenwood held its meetings at the old Ivanhoe Temple in the 700 block of North Tenth Street (razed). The lodge grew rapidly in membership, and almost immediately set about planning to erect a temple of its own. It appears that the site selection committee settled early upon several possible sites in the Downer Avenue shopping district, which was conveniently served by streetcar service and near the center of the population the lodge was intended to serve. Because the Downer Avenue area already had a commercial character with its blocks of recently built stores and large apartment houses, the new lodge building would not be an architectural intrusion in the area. In June of 1914, the present site was identified for purchase for \$4,087.00. Meanwhile fund raising activities and planning for the new lodge proceeded rapidly. By late April of 1915, the fewer than 100 members of Kenwood Lodge had subscribed over \$41,000 in bonds to acquire the land and begin construction of the temple. The firm of Leenhouts and Guthrie, both of whose principals were members of the Kenwood Lodge, was hired to design the building that was begun in June of 1915. The Venetian Gothic structure that Leenhouts and Guthrie designed was dedicated in November of 1916.

The Kenwood Lodge Masons occupied the structure until April 1980 when it was acquired by the Italian Community Center for use as an ethnic community cultural center. During its occupancy, the Italian Community Center has made few changes on the exterior of the structure other than removing the old lettering identifying the structure as the Kenwood Masonic Temple from the terra cotta name plaque on the loggia. The structure was designated as a Milwaukee Landmark by the old Milwaukee Landmarks Commission in April 1981 after the Italian Community Center occupied the building.

The Italian Community Center is a non-profit ethnic cultural organization whose purpose is to sponsor programs that will increase an awareness and appreciation of Italian culture, history, and language and to highlight the positive contributions of Italian-Americans to the history and development of the United States. A major activity of the organization has been to promote

Festa Italiana, a popular ethnic festival held each summer in Milwaukee. The organization had been in existence for years with its headquarters on Brady Street, but the move to the Kenwood Lodge enabled it to grow and expand its activities to include more classes in the Italian language, cooking, opera, art, history and culture. The banqueting hall provided a location for a regular series of fried fish dinners that raised funds for the center. The Kenwood Lodge was a particularly suitable choice as a new home for the Italian Community Center because its eye-catching Venetian Gothic design makes it perhaps the most Italian-looking structure in Milwaukee. Recently, the Italian Community Center began the construction of a new facility downtown and has recently put the old Kenwood Lodge up for sale.

The Architects

The firm of Leenhouts and Guthrie was formed in 1900 when Cornelius Leenhouts and Hugh W. Guthrie joined to practice architecture. The firm was engaged in a varied practice that included the design of numerous houses, apartment buildings and small commercial structures as well as a few industrial buildings and several churches. The Kenwood Masonic Temple is one of the firm's major surviving works. Both Leenhouts and Guthrie were members of the Kenwood Lodge as well as other Masonic orders including the Knights Templar and Shriners.

Leenhouts was born to Dutch immigrant parents in Milwaukee in 1865, where he subsequently apprenticed to various architects including James Douglas and Edward Townsend Mix and Company beginning in 1885. He also worked on the construction drawings for the Agriculture and Transportation buildings at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892. In 1900 he went into partnership with Hugh Guthrie. Leenhouts remained in practice almost until his death in 1935.

Hugh Wilson Guthrie was the junior partner in the firm. He was born in Scotland where he was educated and came to Milwaukee as a young man. After apprenticing with various architects, he joined Leenhouts. Guthrie appears to have been more the business manager of the firm, while Leenhouts probably did more of the design work. He was active in the firm until the 1930's.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the former Kenwood Masonic Temple (Italian Community Center) be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-5 and e-7 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. 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.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. 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.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick, terra cotta or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the buildings. 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 terra cotta.
- d. 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.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain 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.

C. Windows and Doors

1. On the west elevation, retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to its original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. On the west elevation, respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash 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 combination storm and screen units. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of casement sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

3. On the north, south and east elevations, retain architecturally distinctive window units, such as pointed Gothic style sash, if at all possible. New window openings should be placed to create a rhythmic fenestral pattern. The proportions and style of the units should be designed to complement the existing Gothic style sash and to blend with the general fenestral scheme of the old building to the greatest extent possible. The material should match the existing sash in color.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance.

E. Additions

The west and south elevations are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign 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 complex.

G. Sign Features

New plant materials, wooden patio decks, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building. Stockade and chain link fencing are generally not appropriate to the character of the building.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the building.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the structure. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the original west elevation

from the street as the building's façade with new construction set back from the front of the old building at least thirty feet.

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 that are in close proximity to historic buildings must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the original building.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the old building as a distinct freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic structure if they are in close proximity to it.

4. Materials

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