

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

MILWAUKEE PROTESTANT HOME

(Written Winter, 1984)

I. NAME

Historic: Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged

Common: Milwaukee Protestant Home

II. LOCATION

Address: 2449 North Downer Avenue

Tax Key Number: 319-9993-131

Legal Description: Subd of SE ¼ of SW ¼ Sec 15-7-22 Vol 2 P 109 That part of SD Subd & Vac Sts Lying Betw N Prospect Ave-E Bradford Ave-N Downer Ave & A LI Drawn 92' SWLY of & Par With SWLY II Vac Sheridan Ave.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Historic Structure

IV. OWNER OF PROPERTY

Board of Directors
Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged
2449 North Downer Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

V. DESCRIPTION

The Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged is a rambling light brown brick and limestone-trimmed, three-and-a-half story, slate-clad, hip-roofed institutional structure of the Chateausque design built in stages between 1892 and 1926. The original "L" shaped structure, built in 1892, was enlarged in 1897 by an architecturally harmonious addition to the north. A large addition of similar design to the 1892 building was made to the south in 1926. In 1953 a modern wing was added to the west (rear) of the original building followed by another modern concrete-panel-clad, four-story addition to the south in 1971.

The east front is the principle elevation of the structure, which is sited amidst approximately six acres of open lawns in an early twentieth century residential area of one and two-family houses. The main entrance pavilion is the focal point of the façade. A pair of semi-octagonal slate-roofed turrets flanks the limestone-trimmed pavilion with its soaring hipped roof. The entrance is sheltered by an arcaded, Renaissance-style, limestone, flat-roofed porch with a carved foliated frieze and a denticulated cornice.

Another fine limestone portico with paired Doric columns on high pedestals surmounted by a festoon frieze extends across most of the east front of the 1897 north wing further enriching the façade. These

two highly ornamental porticos contrast with the austere simplicity of the fenestration, which consists of tall, one-over-one sash windows in unarticulated openings.

Most ornament on the building, other than the banded limestone coursing that clads the first story level and the paneled quoining used at the corners of the end pavilions, is concentrated at the roofline. Sections of modillion and denticulated cornice alternate with plain molded friezes to mark the transition to the roof where limestone-trimmed, gabled dormers, soaring chimneystacks and molded metal crestings punctuate the red slate roof plains.

The west elevation is of utilitarian design. The modern additions are largely unobtrusive with the exception of the 1971 south wing whose bold materials, large windows, and stark machine-like detailing contrast strongly with the older building it adjoins.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

The Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged is historically significant as a still functioning, private Victorian institution that has continued to operate in accordance with its founding principles and under the sponsorship of its original organization. It is architecturally significant as a fine example of Victorian Chateausque design by master local architect Henry C. Koch.

VII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged be designated as a historic structure in accordance with the provision of Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

VIII. HISTORY

The Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged was founded in 1884 by a group of public spirited, socially prominent Milwaukee women as a home for aged Protestant women of modest means. The original home was located in a residence at 710 North Van Buren Street. The present site had been acquired and construction of the central portion of the structure had been completed by 1892 to the designs of prominent Milwaukee architect Henry C. Koch.

The demand for more space necessitated numerous additions over the years beginning with the elaborate 1897 Francis Hinton Addition to the north, also designed by Henry C. Koch in association with Herman J. Esser. In 1926, architect Fitzhugh Scott, in a remarkable effort to maintain the architectural integrity of the original building, designed the new south wing so that it would be virtually indistinguishable from the stylistically long out-of-fashion original construction. In 1953 Milwaukee architect Gerrit DeGelleke designed the large modern style, Yale Addition to the west enabling the Home to grow to its present population for 190. Finally in 1971-72, the firm of Fitzhugh Scott and Associates added the brutally modern Mabbit Wing to the south. The interior has been remodeled numerous times since the first major renovations in 1941.

The original concept of the Home to provide a place where respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is the underlying principle has been scrupulously maintained over the years as the Home has expanded from the original handful of woman to house its present population of 190 men and women. The Home is still guided, as it always has been, by a working Board of Directors, all women, who serve without remuneration. The Home operates entirely on private funds.

Historically, the Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged is typical of a great many similar institutions founded in the late nineteenth century throughout the United States to alleviate the growing problem of housing the respectable, but indigent elderly. After the Civil War, many upper-class Americans became

aware of the plight of the growing numbers of elderly adults without families to care for them or sufficient means to provide for themselves in the increasingly costly and insensitive world of the burgeoning industrial city. Providing institutions to care for the ‘deserving’ elderly poor, particularly genteel widows and spinsters who had fallen on hard times became a popular expression of Victorian humanitarianism. Typically, committees of high-minded women of comfortable means who used their own money and funds subscribed from their peers to erect the often-imposing structures founded these institutions, like the Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged. The resulting institutions were originally sex-segregated, were frequently restricted to people of particular religious affiliations, and sometimes would admit only applicants of American descent. Would-be residents usually had to be recommended by a board member and to satisfy the narrowly defined criteria of the ‘respectable’ poor, a determination made as a result of rigorous interviews, reference checks and character evaluations by the Board of Directors or Admitting Committee. In the Twentieth Century, most of these proscriptions fell by the wayside for the few institutions, which survived after the advent of the modern commercial nursing or retirement home and the social security and Medicare systems.

IX. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principle concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historical designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the Milwaukee Protestant Home for the Aged. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

1. Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they do not visually intrude upon those elevations visible from the public right-of-way. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, pitch or gable orientation.
2. Retain the original roofing materials, wherever possible. Avoid using new roofing materials that are inappropriate to the style and period of the building.
3. Replace deteriorated roof coverings with new materials that match the old in size, shape, color and texture. Avoid replacing deteriorated roof covering with new materials that differ to such an extent from the old in size, color and texture so that the appearance of the building is altered.

B. Materials

1. Masonry
 - a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone and unpainted brick. 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 point style that were unavailable or not used when the building was constructed.

- c. 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.
- 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, such as artificial cast stone or fake brick veneer.

2. Terra Cotta

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. Repair or replace deteriorated terra cotta with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Precast tinted concrete or cast fiberglass are recommended replacement materials as long as its finished with masonry coating to resemble the original appearance. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or does not resemble the original.

C. Windows and Doors

- 1. Retain existing window and door openings that are on the north, east, and west elevations. Retain the original configuration of panes, sash, doors, lintels, drip molds, sills architraves, pediments, hoods, doors and hardware. Avoid making additional openings or changes in the principal elevations 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. Avoid discarding original doors and door hardware when they can be repaired or reused.
- 2. Respect the stylistic period the 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 inappropriate materials like glass block or the installation of plastic or metal strip awnings or 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.

D. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation

1. Retain porches and steps visible from the public right-of-way that are historically and architecturally appropriate to the building. Avoid altering porches and steps by enclosing open porches or by removing original architectural features.
2. Retain trim and decorative ornamentation including copper downspouts and guttering, copings, cornice, pediments, cresting, finials, columns, capitals, quoins, chimneys, or decorative stone or terra cotta panels. Avoid the removal of trim and decorative ornamentation that is essential to the maintenance of the building's historic character and appearance.
3. Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using replacement materials that do not accurately reproduce the appearance of the original material.

E. Additions

The north and east elevations are integral to the structure's architectural significance. No additions may be made to these elevations. Additions to the south and west elevations 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 all elevations.

F. 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.