

# FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

## SECTION I. NAME

Historic: Werner Kroeger Building

C ommon Name:

## SECTION II. LOCATION

901-905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street

Alderm 12<sup>th</sup> Aldermanic District  
an James N. Witkowiak

Legal description - Tax Key No.: 431-0864-000

(Week's) Plot of Lots 3 & 6 in SE ¼ SEC 32-7-22  
Block 88 E 140' Lot 1

## SECTION III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

## SECTION IV. OWNER

Leader	Cards, Inc.
Scott	Wilke, President
P.O.	Box 4607
Milwaukee,	WI 53204-0607

SECTION V. YEAR BUILT: 1885

ARCHITECT: Unknown

## SECTION VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Werner Kroeger Building is a two story Italianate style commercial building located at the southwest corner of Walker and South 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. It is part of the South 5<sup>th</sup> Street commercial district characterized by a series of Italianate and Queen Anne style storefronts built mostly between 1860 and the turn of the twentieth century. The Werner Kroeger Building anchors one of the four corners at this intersection. Although one of the corners is now vacant, the buildings at the other two have been restored and contribute to the vitality of this important Walker's Point thoroughfare. The Kroeger Building is constructed of solid masonry and is built up to the east and north property lines right to the public sidewalk.

The Werner Kroeger Building fronts on South 5<sup>th</sup> Street and features a first story storefront with corner entrance and three one-over-one sash windows centered on the façade on the second story. The windows are embellished with stone sills and decorative carved lintels with incised designs. The crowning feature of this elevation is the prominent wood cornice supported by four decorative brackets. The center

portion of the cornice projects above a stone name-and-date plaque on which can be found “W. Kroeger 1885”.

The north elevation along Walker Street features a series of small windows on the first story and larger one-over-one sash on the second. Most feature ornamental lintels. A prominent element on this façade is a projecting oriel window supported by decorative brackets. A ghost sign from the Herman Kloehn clothing and merchant tailor shop, 1897-1909, can also be found here. The ornamental wood cornice noted at the front of the building wraps around this elevation as well.

Behind the main two story block of the building are situated a series of wings and additions that extend the building to the rear property line at the alley. The one story solid masonry portion directly behind the main building is original to the 1885 construction and has a blank wall to Walker Street except for one entrance. A small clapboard superstructure sits atop the northeast portion of this wing. Behind this wing and attached to it is a small one story structure, built between 1888 and 1894, of frame construction. It was later veneered with brick at the front and the sidewalls were rebuilt with concrete block. It features a pair of entry doors and the remains of a painted sign “Boehme Sausage Receiving”. Adjoining this wing and running perpendicular to the other structures is situated a two-story structure that is located along the alley. Permit records show that this brick veneered building was moved to the site in 1907 from the southeast corner of South 5<sup>th</sup> and Walker Streets, in order to make room for the construction of the Reik Block. Werner Kroeger moved the structure onto his property apparently to replace an earlier frame structure that had stood on the site since at least 1876. Today, the veneer is extant along the south, north and east sides of the building, but is gone from the alley or west side of the building where asphalt siding is in place. The façade of this building fronts onto Walker Street and is of Italianate design. The lower story or storefront portion of the building has been closed in with concrete block. The upper story features three fine segmentally arched window openings with stone sills. Stone keystones with incised designs accentuate the decorative hoodmolds. Brick pilasters support arches detailed with dentil work. The parapet wall shows evidence of an ornamental cornice that once crowned the façade, but it is now gone.

Combined within the same tax key parcel as the Werner Kroeger Building also stands the building addressed at 905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street. This one story structure abuts the Kroeger Building’s south wall and is clad with perma-stone along South 5<sup>th</sup> Street and clad with concrete block along the south wall. The façade features a recessed front entry and a long horizontal window on the first level and a ribbon window with glass block at the mezzanine level. The present façade dates from 1950 when the old motion picture theater façade was remodeled. The theater itself was a remodeling, in 1913, of an old storefront that had been on the site for many years.

## **SECTION VII. SIGNIFICANCE**

The Werner Kroeger Building is significant as a fine and largely intact example of late Italianate style architecture in Milwaukee. The building’s simple rectangular form and uniform window treatment with ornamental stone hood moldings carry-over from earlier Italianate practice but the exuberant wood cornice with scalloped moldings and elaborate brackets are concessions to the more florid Queen Anne style. The shingled oriel on the Walker Street elevation is also in keeping with the new Queen Anne style. The various adjoining rear wings are indicative of the organic character of many 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings that added and modified rear extensions according to business requirements

The Werner Kroeger Building is likewise significant as a component of the important South 5<sup>th</sup> Street commercial district, located within the greater Walker’s Point National Register Historic District. South 5<sup>th</sup> Street and National Avenue once formed the commercial heart of the Walker’s Point neighborhood and offered nearby residents everything from clothing stores to grocery shops, millinery establishments, boot and shoe stores, saloons, bakeries and even movie theaters and meeting halls. The concentration of Italianate and Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival style commercial buildings, which

also housed their proprietors, is unequalled in Milwaukee. South 5<sup>th</sup> Street was long recognized as the hub of Walker's Point and for a few years early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the site for the annual Yahrmarkt, a street festival with entertainment and special sales to promote the area. Werner Kroeger, along with his brothers, was one of the pioneer merchants in the neighborhood and what we would today refer to as an "anchor" in the business district. Werner Kroeger's building anchors an important corner in the district and contributes to the continuity of the 19<sup>th</sup> century streetscape, a streetscape that has experienced a significant amount of restoration in the last few years.

## SECTION VIII. HISTORY

The Werner Kroeger Building is representative of the very successful and entrepreneurial Kroeger family, members of which were the movers and shakers of the Walker's Point business community in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A Henry Kroeger is known to have owned this lot from July 2, 1855 to September 7, 1858. He may have been one of the four sons of the senior Herman Kroeger who came to this country from Coesfeldt, Westphalia, Prussia in 1844. As there were a number of Henry Kroegers in Milwaukee at that time, additional research will have to be done to determine a family connection. Werner Kroeger, whose name is on the building, purchased the property on March 9, 1865 for \$1500. He was a tinsmith by trade and practiced his profession at various locations within a block of this corner prior to his purchase of today's 901-905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The Kroegers apparently occupied an existing building on the site before constructing the present building (or remodeling the prior building) in 1885. He and his family (Casper W., Rozalia R., Katherine, Margaretha, Herman H.) lived in the upstairs flat. The store downstairs housed Werner's hardware and tin business, which also included the sale of stoves, hollowware, sash, doors and blinds. Fire insurance maps show that a two-story frame building, located along the alley served as the tin shop for the business.

Werner retired from his business in 1892 and for a couple of years his nephews Henry C. and John S. ran a retail grocery store on the premises. They were followed by grocer A. J. Palmer. Beginning in 1897, Herman F.W. Kloehn leased the premises for his clothing and merchant tailor business. It is the sign for his business that is still visible on the Walker Street façade of the building. When he relocated his shop in 1910, Jesse Faerber leased the ground floor for a dry goods business. Zoeller Bros. clothing moved into the storefront in 1911. Since at least 1921 the premises have been operated as a grocery store under a succession of proprietors.

Werner Kroeger died on May 27, 1913 having lived 55 years at this location. His widow, Maria (aka Mary) Elizabeth, continued to live in the upstairs flat until her death in 1926. Subsequent owners of the entire property included Martin Mikkelson (1927), Milwaukee Improvement Company (1927), Steve and Pauline Kovatovich (1927-1930), Leo and Elizabeth Jeka (1930-1941), and Elizabeth Jeka (1941-1947).

The adjacent building at today's 905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street initially served as part of Werner's hardware and tin business. Fire Insurance atlases show later occupants to have included a furniture store and wallpaper store. In 1906 the structure's interior was remodeled for use as a motion picture parlor. This early theater was called the Ace and by the next year, the National. It was last known as the Palace and operated under this name from 1908 to 1929. Occupancy permits show the building continued as a theater through 1937. Deeds show leases between widow Maria Elizabeth and Otto H. Preusser Sr. in 1918 and 1923 for use of 905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street as a moving picture theater. Permit records indicate that the structure was extensively rebuilt in 1913 to "conform to the ordinance" on movie theaters and had a seating capacity of 346. Local architect Charles L. Lesser was responsible for the design.

After a period of vacancy, 905 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street became the headquarters for the Boehme Sausage Company beginning in 1942. The premises were used for the slaughter of animals in the sausage making process, featured a smokehouse and served as the company's retail outlet. Boehme Sausage bought the entire property from Elizabeth Jeka in 1947. The Boehme name can be seen on the Walker Street side of 901 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street and on the South 5<sup>th</sup> Street façade of 905 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Boehme later sold to Paul Milling who had Milling

Sausage Inc. at 905 South 5<sup>th</sup>. Milling sold to Leader Cards in 1985 on a land contract and Leader Cards received the warranty deed to the premises in August of 1990.