

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

HENRY HARNISCHFEGER HOUSE

(Written Winter 1990-91)

I. NAME

Historic: Henry Harnischfeger House

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

3424 West Wisconsin Avenue

Tax Key Number: 388-2251-000

CERTIFIED SURVEY MAP NO. 4941 IN NE ¼ SEC 25-7-21, PARCEL 1.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Julie Monnier
P. O. Box 93832
Milwaukee, WI 53203

V. YEAR BUILT

1905

Architect: Eugene R. Liebert

V. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Henry Harnischfeger House is a dark brown brick, 2-½ story, gable-roofed, German Renaissance Revival style mansion on a raised, rock faced limestone terrace. The imposing structure, built in 1905, is sited in the middle of its lot. There is a broad front lawn with landscaping limited to foundation plantings. The Wisconsin Avenue side is the principal elevation. It is elaborately composed of numerous projecting and receding elements including a corbelled oriel, a deeply recessed entrances, an arcaded loggia, a projecting sun porch, and a massive paneled stepped gable. Extensive limestone trim accents the complex composition. The most distinctive feature of the façade is the second story loggia with its two piers carved in the shape of medieval knights. These were emblematic of the Harnischfeger name, which means, "armor polisher." The elaborate side elevations are dominated by the soaring half-timbered gables. The porte cochere on the east side is surmounted by a chamber at the second floor with a parapet gable ornamented with limestone ball finials.

With the exception of the replacement of the original sun porch casement windows with fixed glass and the installation of a new front door, the exterior of the house has been little altered. The original garage/carriage house that stood at the rear of the lot was demolished many years ago. The original pantile roofing on the front roof slopes was replaced with red asphalt shingle roofing about 1987. The rear loggia at the northwest corner of the building has also been enclosed.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Harnischfeger House is architecturally significant as a fine and rare example of German Renaissance Revival style domestic architecture. It is the finest surviving example of this unusual, late nineteenth century, continental European architectural mode in Milwaukee and displays superb craftsmanship. The house is probably the best remaining example of the domestic architecture of Eugene R. Liebert, one of Milwaukee's master architects at the turn-of-the-century.

The Harnischfeger House is historically significant for its association with Henry Harnischfeger, a major Milwaukee industrialist, who made important contributions to advancing heavy construction technology. Harnischfeger lived in this house for most of his adult life during the period when his company made many of its most significant innovations.

VIII. HISTORY

The Harnischfeger House was built on the residence of Henry Harnischfeger in 1905. Harnischfeger (1855-1930) was a major Wisconsin industrialist whose firm, now known as the Harnischfeger Corporation, has an international reputation in the manufacture of heavy construction and excavating equipment.

Henry Harnischfeger was born at Salmuenster, Germany, in 1855, a son of Konstantin and Christine (Adrian) Harnischfeger, who spent their lives in their native country were the father was born in 1817 and the mother in 1818. The former was for many years proprietor of a tanning business and passed away in 1889.

Henry Harnischfeger attended public schools in Germany and afterward learned the locksmith's trade. Attracted by the opportunities of the new world, he came to the United States in 1872. He arrived in New York and entered the employ of the tool department of the Singer Manufacturing Company at Elizabeth, New Jersey, remaining there one year. He next became an employee in the tool department of the Brown & Sharpe Manufacturing Company at Providence, Rhode Island, and remained with that concern for eight years.

In 1881 Mr. Harnischfeger moved to Milwaukee and was assigned the position of foreman of the milling machine department of the Whitehill Sewing Machine Company. While thus engaged, he met Alonzo Pawling and the latter's first partner, Moritz Weis, who were then associated in business under the name of the Milwaukee Tool and Pattern works. A little later, Mr. Harnischfeger purchased the interest of Mr. Weis in the business and the name was then changed to Pawling and Harnischfeger. The new firm engaged in general jobbing work in both the machine and pattern lines and in the building of machinery under contract. They were somewhat handicapped by limited capital and equipment, but in 1886 and 1887 small additions were made to their factory, permitting increased production. Their output largely consisted of carving machines, brick making machines and a special device called the Poppet

Valve Governor. In 1887 Pawling & Harnischfeger built the first three motor electric traveling crane for Allis-Chalmers. The operation of this electric crane was so successful that a company was organized to manufacture electric cranes. The three organizers of the new business were Messrs. Pawling, Harnischfeger and Shaw. The enterprise was established under the name of the Shaw Electric Crane Company, with Mr. Harnischfeger serving as president. From that time forward, Pawling and Harnischfeger were permanently associated with the crane industry. Later Mr. Shaw left the firm and was succeeded by Mathias A. Beck as chief engineer. Harnischfeger realized the potential demand for a mechanical means of replacing the arduous hand labor required in the digging and refilling of trenches and general excavation work. In 1912 his engineers were engaged to design and develop a line of wheel and boom type trenching machines, draglines, back fillers, tampers, power shovels and excavator cranes, with the result that the firm manufactured and sold the most complete line of excavating machinery in the world.

The site of the first Pawling and Harnischfeger plant was at 224-228 South First Street. The company was located there from 1884 until 1905. The original factory building is gone, but the current two-story cream brick commercial style office building was used by the company from 1901 to 1905. In 1903 fire partially destroyed the foundry and machine shop complex behind the office building. Though the company rebuilt this facility, it moved almost all of its operations in 1905 to its newly completed office and production complex on West National Avenue between South 44th and South 46th Streets in the village of West Milwaukee. Today manufacturing still takes place at the National Avenue facility with the corporate headquarters located in suburban Brookfield, Wisconsin.

Harnischfeger was typical of many German-American industrialists in Milwaukee. He belonged to the turnverein, the Wisconsin Club, the Old Settlers Club and the Milwaukee Association of Commerce. He was also a member of the Wisconsin Natural History Society and had been active in the Associated Charities of Milwaukee.

In 1926 the aging Harnischfeger and his wife built a more manageable house on Terrace Avenue on the city's fashionable East Side that was also designed by Eugene Liebert, and fled the noise and congestion of increasingly commercial Wisconsin Avenue. The Wisconsin Avenue house is now a fifteen-unit apartment building. Harnischfeger died of a heart attack in 1930.

The Architect

Eugene Liebert (1866-1945) was born and educated in Germany and came to Milwaukee in 1883. He first obtained employment at the Trostel and Gallun tannery, Trostel being a relative. Subsequently he worked as a draftsman for architect H.C. Koch beginning in 1884. Liebert followed H. P. Schnetzky when the latter left his partnership with Koch, and Liebert worked as a foreman (1887, 1888) and then as a draftsman (1889, 1890) for Schnetzky. The two went into partnership as Schnetzky and Liebert from 1891 through 1896. During their collaboration they designed the McGeoch Building (1890, 1894), the J.P. Kissinger Block (1893), the Ernst Pommer House (1895), and the Germania Building (1896), among other structures. Liebert went into practice on his own in 1897 and had offices in a number of downtown buildings including the Colby-Abbot Building. His later commissions included the additions to the Red Star Yeast Plant (1899 – the 1930s), the Concordia College Administration Building (1900), the Fred Kraus residence (1902), the A. O. Trostel residence (1907-08), and the Henry Harnischfeger residences (1905 and 1926). Many of Liebert's clients were prominent German-Americans, and his work reflects German stylistic influences.

Two of Liebert's four sons, Walter F. and Carl, worked with him at different times during this career, Carl worked with his father during the latter's final years. Eugene Liebert was active until his death on April 27, 1945. For most of his adult life Liebert occupied the house at 1948 North Holton Street, which he had built in 1887 when he was 21 years of age. His finest surviving residential designs are the Chateausque Fred Kraus residence, 1521 N. Prospect Avenue (1902), and the remarkable Henry Harnischfeger House. The Harnischfeger House was the inspiration for Liebert's masterpiece, the palatial Albert O. Trostel House, formerly at 3200 N. Lake Drive, which was razed in 1935 after a fire.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Henry Harnischfeger House, 3424 West Wisconsin Avenue, be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-3, e-5, e-6, e-7 and e-9 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 decision 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. Retain the remaining tile roofing. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the existing materials as closely as possible.

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 building. 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. Window and Doors

- 1. 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. 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.

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, east 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. Site Features

New plant materials, 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

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 south elevation from the street as the building's façade with new construction set apart from the front of the old building.

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 free-standing structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project the 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.