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# Picturing Milwaukee: Historic Water Tower Neighborhood

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# Picturing Milwaukee Historic Water Tower Neighborhood

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# Project: **PICTURING MILWAUKEE**

## Historic Water Tower Neighborhood



### **WHY THE HISTORIC WATER TOWER NEIGHBORHOOD?**

The Historic Water Tower **N**eighborhood, located on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, is at the forefront of historic preservation activism in Milwaukee. The ideas driving the summer 2013 field school – examining practices of historic preservation, stewardship, and ecological conservation – emerged from neighborhood residents. We are thankful to the Historic Water Tower neighborhood residents for welcoming us in their midst and for helping us document their stories. Neighborhood scholars mentored our students and reviewed their projects. The neighborhood association raised funds, provided us with classroom space and helped us in data collection. Residents allowed us to enter their buildings, measure and document them and allowed us to interview them.

This project coincides with the 40-year celebration of the Historic Water Tower Neighborhood organization and we plan to mark this occasion by highlighting stellar stories of stewardship by local residents. In this field school, we have documented a few buildings and collected many oral histories of stalwarts and leaders from this neighborhood. We hope that this project will be a precursor to more celebratory collaborations between the neighborhood and the University.

The Historic Water Tower neighborhood has witnessed architectural and social changes over the last four decades. New buildings and businesses appeared, a neighboring beach became a popular public destination, and the retail strip along Downer Avenue has seen businesses come and go. Local preservation and conservation efforts have helped retain historic buildings in the neighborhood even while increasing diversity has led to new conflicts. We seek to explore, examine, highlight, and share myriad neighborhoods stories of community engagement, dreams of a bright future, and fond memories of a rich past.





## WHO ARE WE?

The Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures collaborative project at UW Milwaukee and Madison introduces an interdisciplinary research track concentrating on the examination of the physical, cultural, and social aspects of our built environment. The program serves students enrolled in the UW Milwaukee and Madison campuses respectively. It involves faculty members on both campuses with diverse research and teaching interests, including urban and architectural history, cultural landscapes, urban and rural vernacular architecture, public history, and environmental.

Fieldwork is an important aspect of this program and a cross-campus fieldwork school is a special offering of this project. This summer the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures field school provided students with an immersive experience in the field recording of the built environment and cultural landscapes and an opportunity to learn how to write history literally “from the ground up.” Students received training in site documentation (including photography, measured drawings, digital documentation, audio-visual production), historic interpretation of buildings and landscapes (focusing on how to “read” buildings within their material, political, social, cultural and economic contexts), and primary source research (including oral history, archival research, architectural analysis).

## WHAT IS PROJECT: PICTURING MILWAUKEE?

We are storytellers, collecting and relaying tales of places and neighborhoods in Milwaukee. We call this idea “Picturing Milwaukee” and our objective is to conjure up –or picture– various neighborhoods of Milwaukee like designs in a wonderfully complex quilt. Individually unique and beautiful, each street is part of a larger whole and we are interested in examining how the local and the urban relate to each other – how a street fits into a larger urban narrative. Understanding this relationship between the whole and its parts is important because it shows us how individual places produce our larger world. We are the sum total of smaller units and such an understanding promotes civic belonging, allowing us to reimagine ourselves as stewards of our worlds.

Why do we tell stories? Stories are powerful not only because they connect and transfix, not only because they are accessible to all, but also because they spread. Stories produce more stories; transferred from one person to another, stories disperse across time and space. Stories produce revolutions – not the kinds that we saw in 1789 and 1917 in France and Russia or the campaign for free speech that set campuses on fire in 1964, not even the kinds we saw recently in 2011 at Tahrir Square or the Wisconsin State Capitol – although those too are born of stories of resistance and intrigue. We collect stories about morals and ethics, ones that recount honor and perseverance, or those that our neighbors and community members communicate to us – all with a moral at the end of it. We are interested in stories that become part of our speech and imaginations; stories that teach us how to behave and react to life and how to walk and to talk – those stories that in turn gently transform who we are and what we do.



## WHAT DO WE DO?

At the BLC field school, as we explore urban neighborhoods we discover their complexity. Neighborhoods are physical locations, material artifacts of everyday life, centers of symbolic action and domestic activities, and community spaces of interaction and social life.

In 1982 Jules Prown asked, “Are there aspects of mind to be discovered in objects that differ from, complement, supplement, or contradict what can be learned from more traditional literary and behavioral sources?” Prown was referring to the importance of the material world around us in telling us stories of our culture in ways that words, texts, and traditional historical sources did not. Our study of this neighborhood begins with an analysis of the world of homes, streets, gardens, gates, and asphalt. We wanted to find out if the physical character of the Historic Water Tower neighborhood could tell us something about its history that written accounts and official histories failed to describe.

In such a study, mere stylistic and aesthetic categories of analysis fall short because these issues merely parrot what the canonical sources of architecture tell us. Describing a building merely by its style—Neo Classical, Tudor revivals—seem superficial since these categories say nothing about how the meanings and interpretations of these buildings changed over time. Questions such as “who was the architect?” or “what is the aesthetic style of a building?” may well explain the initial context and reasons why an architect built a mansion. But these questions say nothing about social life in these spaces and a pittance about the experiences of those who live in these spaces. Stories of women, children, gardeners, butlers, and maids remain untold. Esoteric information about classical details and building morphologies may enhance the significance and value of the building, but they are not the sole registers of architectural connoisseurship.

Attending to this gap in our knowledge of the built environment, the BLC field school turns towards the study of cultural landscapes as a way to interpret this neighborhood. The term cultural landscape is one that is difficult to define. Geographers, anthropologists, and material culture scholars understand the term in different ways. Geographer Carl Sauer in his essay “The Morphology of Landscape” defines cultural landscape as “fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.” Others focus on the human experience of place rather than merely studying its physical characters. Scholars such as J. B. Jackson and Kevin Lynch draw our attention to symbolic, cultural and cognitive cues in such landscapes while Dolores Hayden and Setha Low argue that understanding cultural landscapes necessitates an exploration of how we perceive those landscapes and how such practices of spectatorship may be contested.



To us, cultural landscape is phenomena materialized in space. We define cultural landscape as the materialization of a complex relationship between an individual and her larger cultural and material contexts. Cultural landscapes need not be physical, tangible and visible. Indeed, much of what we search for may be symbolic, experiential and sensorial—invisible to our eyes. And just as we make our cultural landscapes, these landscapes influence who we are.

We do not merely read cultural landscapes. We experience them in multisensory ways. In our field school we respond to Dell Upton's cautionary note that our overdependence on reading, the act of visual decoding, may not be a fruitful approach towards a critical study of cultural landscapes. Indeed, unseen forces, political alliances, and non-visual cues may indeed play an important role in our engagement with our cultural landscapes.

The projects from the 2013 BLC field school will engage your senses. Field school students, using hand-rigged recording equipment, captured the sounds you will hear in their documentaries. Their analysis of the buildings will alert you to the sense of touch and the material qualities of the buildings more than the visual and stylistic features of the architecture.

At the BLC field school we begin with vernacular architecture scholar Paul Groth's argument that cultural landscape studies, "focus most on the history of how people have used everyday space—buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards—to establish their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning." Groth's emphasis on relationships challenges the often-singular focus on architectural authorship and style used by architectural historians. In this field school we explored the experiences and roles of these myriad inhabitants and underscored the role of these unknown individuals in the making of this neighborhood.

Groth, Paul. "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi Eds., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). Setha Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

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## **HOW DID WE STUDY THE NEIGHBORHOOD?**

In order to study the cultural landscape of the Historic Water Tower neighborhood we divide the region into four discrete but interdependent and overlapping case studies—a commercial strip, a beach, a residential area, and a cultural institution. These cases are geographically and socially distinct; so much so, that we refer to them as ecological biomes. Yet the overlaps between these zones show their interdependence— and it is in these interconnected worlds that we find the identity of the Historic Water Tower neighborhood.

### **Edges**

Bradford beach defines the extents of the first zone. This artificial beach is indeed an ecological boundary between land and water; but it is also a human borderland where residents of this neighborhood encounter strangers from the outer reaches of the city. That encounter between the neighbor and the stranger may not always be congenial, yet the politics of this border zone brings forth central contradictions of diversity, urbanity and civility that plague our contemporary cities.

### **Main Street**

The second zone, a commercial strip along Downer Avenue, is both a main street and a marketplace akin to many similar streets in small towns across America. Friendship, social interaction, social life and experiences along Downer Avenue are formed around trade, transaction, and consumption incessantly framed within larger global and national trends. Yet the social and material culture of this street is a product of unique local conditions. Downer is a product of local residents' memory and imaginations as much as it is a place made of brick and mortar.

### **Homes**

The residences loosely define the third category of space. Careful architectural measurements, material culture analysis and kinesthetic engagement with the homes framed our quest to capture the sense of place of this residential domain. The narrow lens of architectural style and historical traditions does not capture the uniqueness of this neighborhood. We argue that the neighborhood is best described via the residents' emotional attachment to their homes and the careful labor of those who maintain and sustain these domestic spaces.

### **Institutions/Villa Terrace**

The final case study is Villa Terrace, once a home and now a museum. Villa Terrace serves as a bridge between the neighborhood and a larger cultural world. Even in its distant past, a mimetic attempt to recreate an Italian home in the snowy shores of Lake Michigan was an act of cultural exchange and appropriation. But the process of cultural bridging is present today too, as this iconic landmark hosts art exhibits and events from across the city and the world. As part of Milwaukee's annual Museum Mile, Villa Terrace is part of a group of arts and culture museums located on Milwaukee's historic East Side.



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For the research process, our group identified edges and boundaries as two useful concepts that could help us interpret the beach and the bluff regions along the Historic Water Tower neighborhood. Edges differentiate the spaces we study and boundaries define the character of each space.





# EDGES AND BOUNDARIES

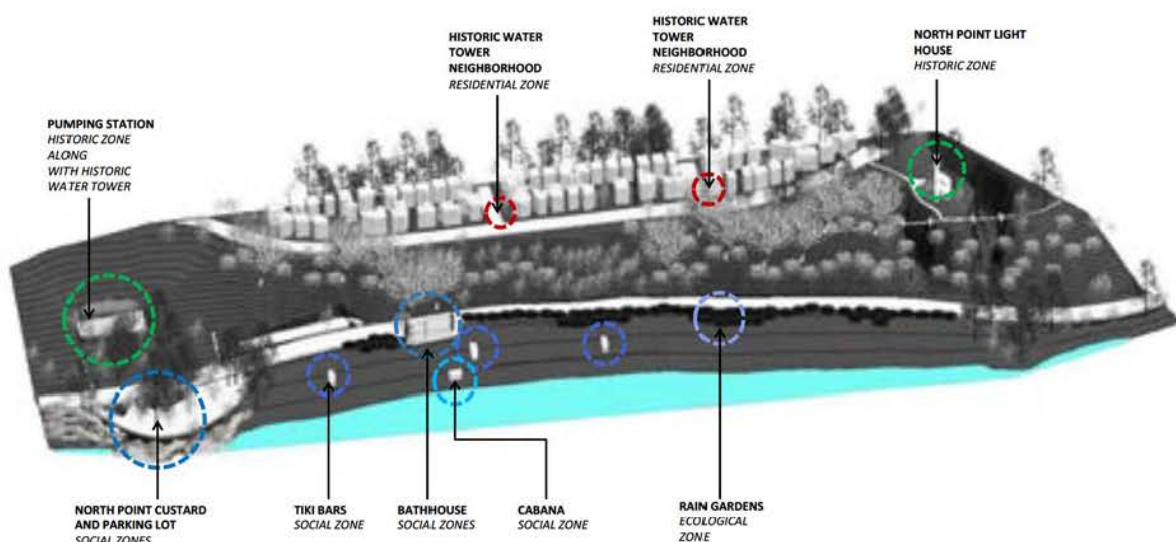


## Edges

Edges form where different spatial domains meet. These domains may be defined by ideas, user groups, locational characteristics, or activities. The nature of the territories determine what kind of edge is created. Naturally, edges are rife with complexity as multiple domains come together, or stand in conflict with each other. This complexity makes edges a rich source of information for us.

For research purposes, we studied edges along and surrounding Bradford Beach. These edges, to name a few, include the bluff along the beach, Lincoln Memorial Drive, and the shoreline of the beach itself. Over the last century, many of the edges in this area have changed and some have even been created or destroyed. This makes the Bradford Beach/ Bluff area a very interesting and dynamic edge to study.

The bluff represents an edge between the city, the beach and the lake. But it also represents an edge between the neighborhood, which has retained much of its historical context, and the beach, which is frequently updated and is the site of much development. The bluff is a fascinating juxtaposition of these habitable spaces coming into contact along a topographical drop. It is a geographic feature that helps to both unite them as well as isolate one from the other.



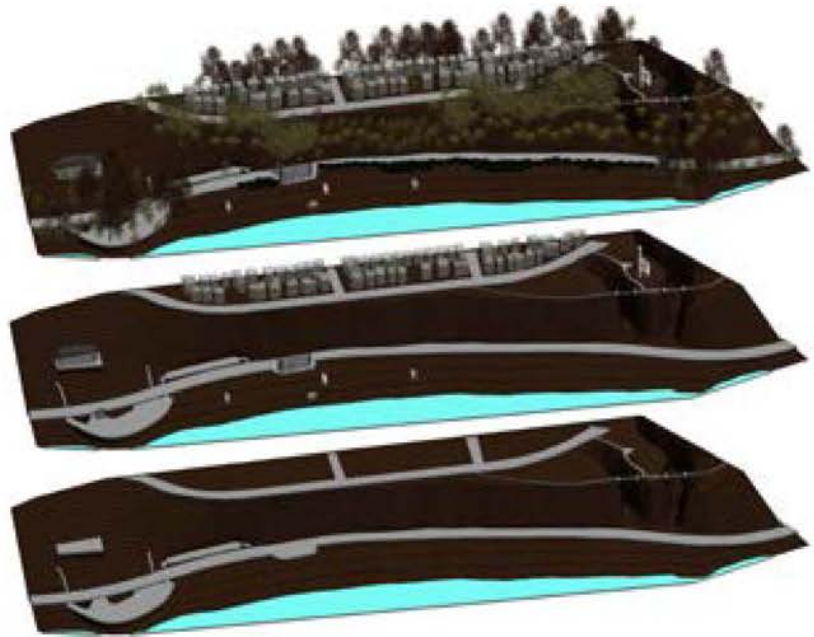
Rendering showing the different areas of the bluff and beach. These areas extend beyond the marked spaces to meet with each other, creating the edges that exist throughout Bradford Beach and the bluff.

# Boundaries

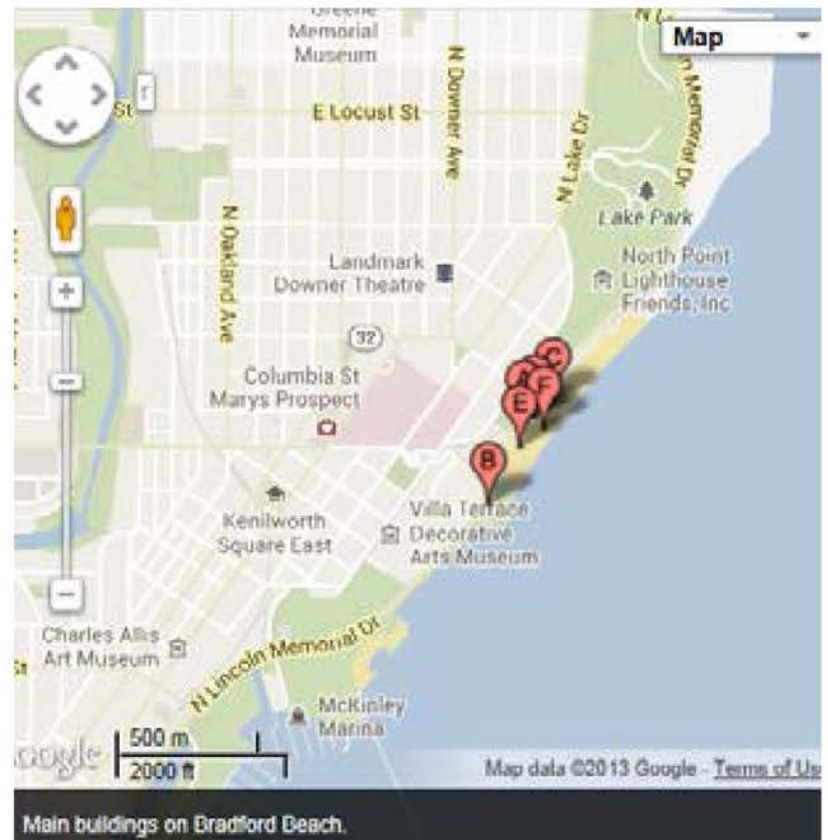
Within the areas created by these edges, we have observed three kinds of boundaries: physical, interpersonal, and atmospheric. Physical boundaries produce hard divisions on the beach such as the concrete patio surrounding the bath house creating its own space, which is different from that of the sand and other spaces on the beach.

Interpersonal boundaries are areas between different groups of people. These boundaries can separate people based on age, gender, race, or activity.

Atmospheric boundaries change according to the time of day as well as the type of people in an area. These boundaries mark different areas based on the atmosphere or “vibes” of the area. While the objects and people in an area can affect atmospheric boundaries, less obvious influences such as music, ambient noises, and smells are also instrumental enough in marking atmospheric boundaries.



Map of the bluff and Bradford Beach. Bottom: a contour image of the area; center: structures added to the contours; top: vegetation added.





# BRADFORD BEACH



## Bradford Beach History

Residents who lived on the lake used to go to Bradford Beach to swim, but in the 1960s and 1970s, Bradford Beach became a less desirable destination because of fights that would break out between beach-goers. The other reason was the lack of maintenance of beach and waters. Dead alewives would frequently wash up onshore. By the 1980s, Milwaukee County had begun trying to improve the conditions on Bradford Beach. Small additions, including a volleyball court, helped to bring more people to the beach.

The lake front is very important for the people of Milwaukee, so a number of proposals were made for activities on Bradford Beach. Many worried about the intensity of development. Residents who lived nearby were concerned about the potential for overcrowding on Bradford Beach and the lakefront. As a compromise, many changes and new buildings on Bradford Beach are designed to be non-permanent and could be removed with no lasting damage to the beach or the lakefront.

Over the last few generations, there have been a number of developmental changes to Bradford Beach, which has resulted in a change of how the beach is used. What was once a beach used by local families has become a place for young people from all over the city to swim, work out, eat, play, hang out, get a tan, and drink. The beach caters to different groups now than it did in the past. Even though the physical and material culture on the beach looks temporary, it has actually made a permanent change to how Bradford Beach is used.



Looking northeast on Bradford Beach, July 1954.



# Present Day Bradford Beach

Go to the beach on a warm, sunny day. What's the first thing you see? People "having a good time," explained the Tiki bar manager. They are playing volleyball, soaking up the sun, chatting with friends, having a beer, or watching their kids splash in the waves. But what is the story underneath this sandy place? There has to be some logic to the seemingly unorganized milieu of groups. Stay long enough, and you will find that this one "beach" is really a complex landscape of many zones and worlds that intersect in unique ways.

Before examining the different zones of the beach, we need to consider the services that the beach offers and how beach-goers utilize them. From our observations, Bradford Beach offers four different services: basic amenities (cleanliness and protection), food and drink, leisure, and health.

The beach provides basic services which provide cleanliness, protection and health. As a county park, the area is maintained for the public.

The beach provides refreshment. Food and drinks are available at the bath house, the Tiki bars located on the sand, and the North Point Custard Stand directly south of the beach. Beach-goers patronize the food and drink stands on the beach, but many people come to the beach for their lunch break, simply to eat a burger at North Point Custard or to have a drink at the Tiki bar. For these people, the beach has a different meaning than it does for those who come for leisure.

The beach provides health and fitness opportunities. Many people go to the beach to play competitive volleyball. The bath house itself is used for exercise routines. The storage boxes outside the bath house are used to practice jumping, and the surrounding sand is used as a field to pull tires. The bath house is also used as a rest stop for the many bikers who cycle through on Lincoln Memorial Drive.



The cabana rental area of Bradford Beach with the rope fence visible in the foreground.

Barbara Elsner, interview by Niyati Naik, Milwaukee, June 17, 2013.

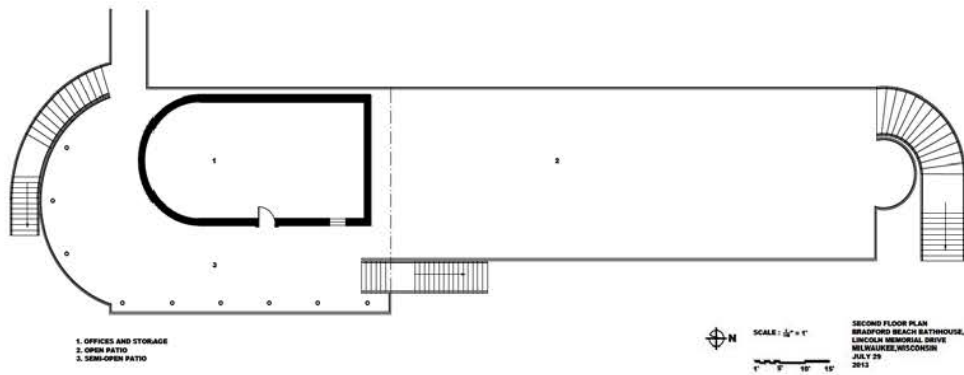
Chris Bauer, interview by Jonathan Schaefer, Milwaukee, June 28, 2013.

Michael Connor, interview by Niyati Naik, Milwaukee, June 23, 2013.

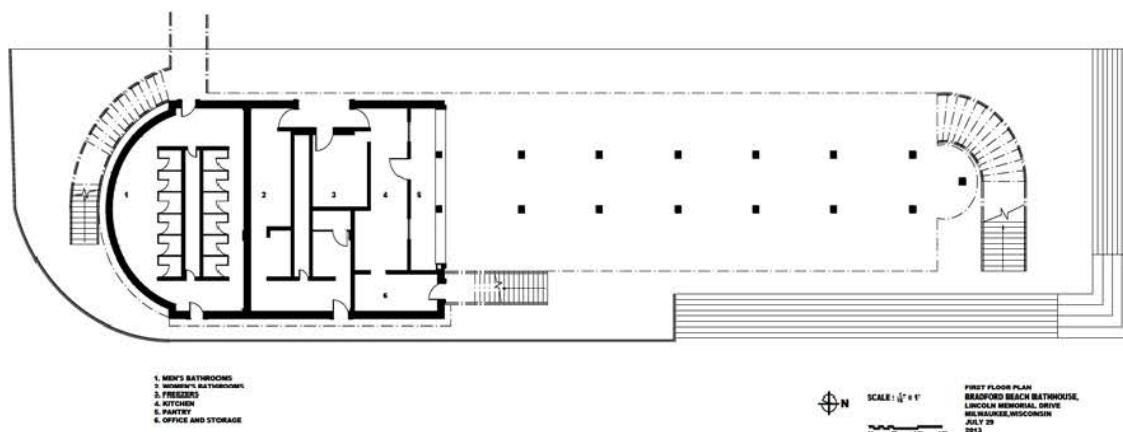
"Miscellaneous Historic Photos," Historic Water Tower Neighborhood, 2013. <http://hwtm.org/photo-gallery/historic-photos-gallery/>.



# BRADFORD BEACH BATH HOUSE



Second floor plan of the Bradford Beach Bath House.



First floor plan of the Bradford Beach Bath House. Lighter floor boards show where a wall once stood.



View of the Bradford Beach Bath House from the beach (looking South).

Designed to look like a ship on water, the Bradford Beach bath house is centrally located on the beach. Opened in 1950, it was likely the first permanent building on Bradford Beach. The bath house is a two-storied, concrete building with bathrooms and a concession stand on the first floor, and storage space for boats and equipment as well as small offices for the lifeguards on the second floor. The second floor also has long open areas that provide beautiful vistas of the beach. The patio was originally a wooden structure, which housed showers for the swimmers and beach-goers. Presently, it has benches where beach-goers sit and talk or get a tan. The benches in the semi-open areas are usually occupied by a younger crowd, many of whom come to the beach to play volleyball or to have lunch. The bath house, because of its length, blocks the view of the road from the beach. This makes Bradford Beach seem like more of a getaway destination and allows people on the beach to feel removed from the city. A bridge connects the bath house to Lake Park, furthering the illusion of isolation from the city.



View of the Bradford Beach Bath House from the beach (looking North).



# TIKI BARS



## New Attractions on the Beach

The Tiki bars are temporary structures on Bradford Beach. They were part of new developments on Bradford Beach in 2011. There are three Tiki bars on the beach, each a prefabricated wooden frame structure. They resemble cottages with thatch roofing, sometimes found on beaches in tropical regions. All the Tiki bars have fencing attached to one side for storage. They have counters on all four sides, with bamboo chairs so people can sit at the bar. The central Tiki bar has a large, shaded tent attached to one side, as well as tables with shade umbrellas for customers.

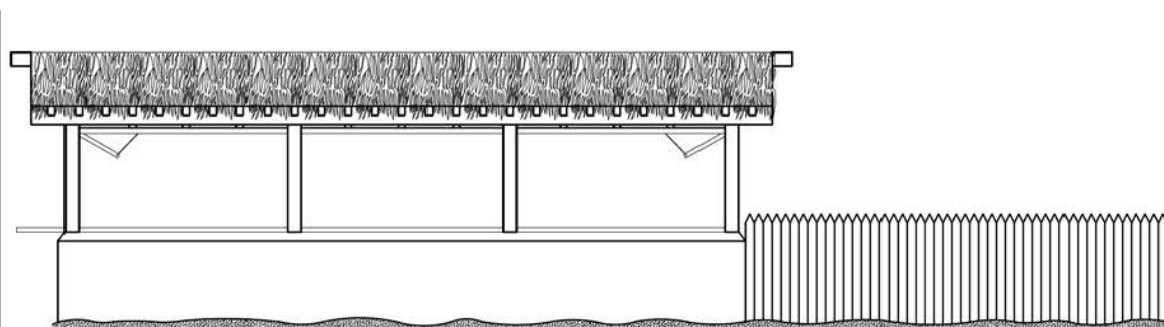
## Making the Beach a Destination

In contrast to the North Point Custard Stand, the Tiki bars serve alcohol in addition to food. Thus, the Tiki bars tend to attract a different group of visitors than the custard stand. For instance, the South Tiki bar mostly serves young adults and college students, as this is the area of the beach where they congregate.

All three Tiki Bars are set back from the water and are close to the spaces for other beach activities, such as volleyball. They are intermediate spaces which connect different parts of the beach. Located between those who are swimming, tanning, working out, or playing on the beach, the Tiki bars become a central feature on the beach, providing a “tropical” place to relax, eat, and drink.

This “tropical” feeling is also due, in part, to the construction of the Tiki bar itself. The thatched roof and bamboo bar stools gives the structure an exotic appearance, while the music pumping from the speakers lets beach visitors know when they are getting close to the Tiki bars. Once you approach the bar, the many refrigerators, coolers, and taps are visible. By having these items visible, the Tiki bars become iconic reminders of a carefully crafted image of Bradford Beach.



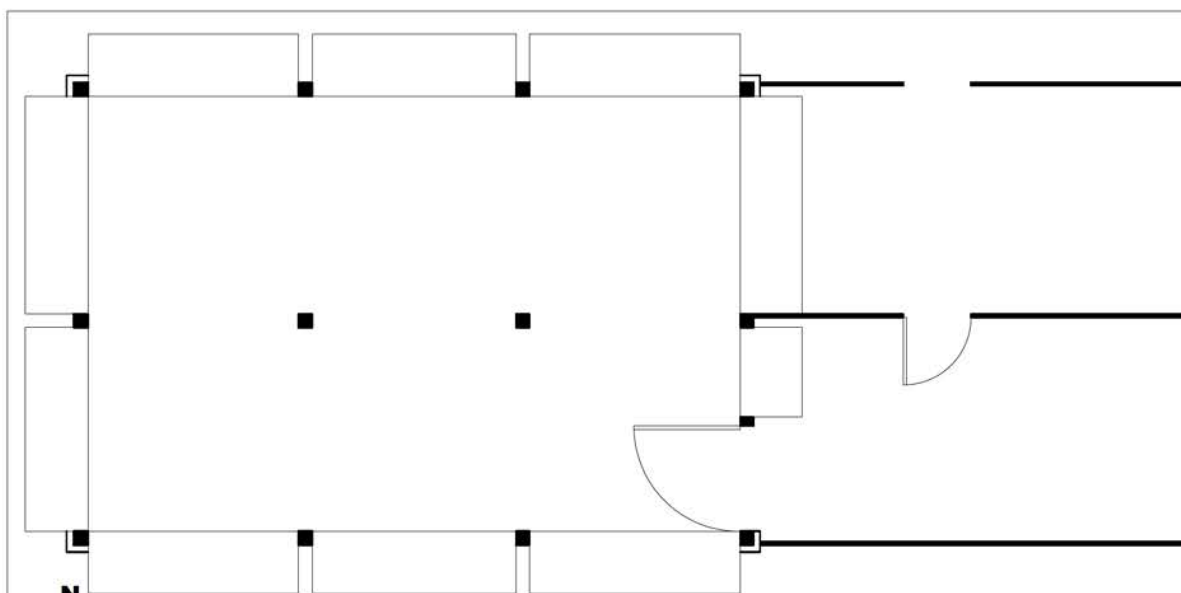


SCALE : 1/4 " = 1'



**ELEVATION**  
**BRADFORD BEACH TIKI BAR,**  
**LINCOLN MEMORIAL DRIVE**  
**MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN**  
**JULY 29**  
**2013**

Side elevation of the Bradford Beach Tiki bars.



N



SCALE : 1/4 " = 1'



**FLOOR PLAN**  
**BRADFORD BEACH TIKI BAR,**  
**LINCOLN MEMORIAL DRIVE**  
**MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN**  
**JULY 29**  
**2013**

Floor plan of the Bradford Beach Tiki bars.



# BEACH VISITORS

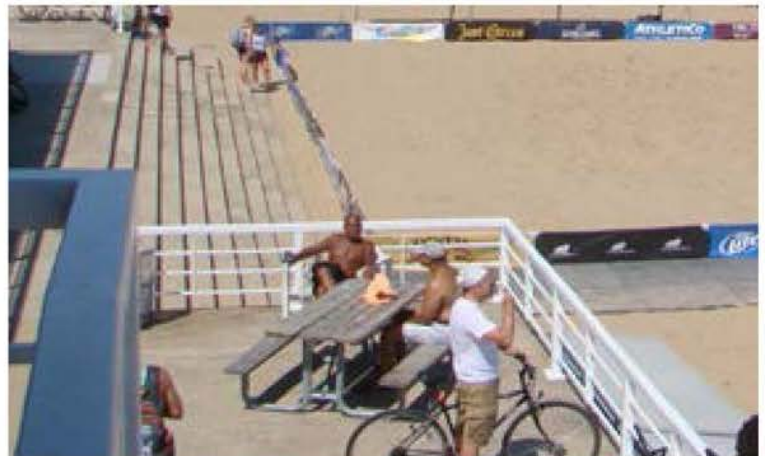


## How Do Visitors Use Bradford Beach?

Spend a few minutes at the beach on a busy day, and it is easy to see that every person who goes to Bradford Beach has a slightly different reason for being there. At first glance, the beach may seem to be a very hectic space with people moving constantly and many different activities happening right next to each other. But after careful observation, one may discern fairly distinct sections. These sections are, perhaps surprisingly, not simply identified by demographics. Instead, these spaces mark the different tempos of beach visitors, or how quickly visitors move through a particular area. To better illustrate how the beach can be divided into sections by tempo, we have analyzed the first and second floors of the bath house.



A man walks through the Bath House as part of his exercise routine.



These men spend their time at Bradford Beach socializing with others.



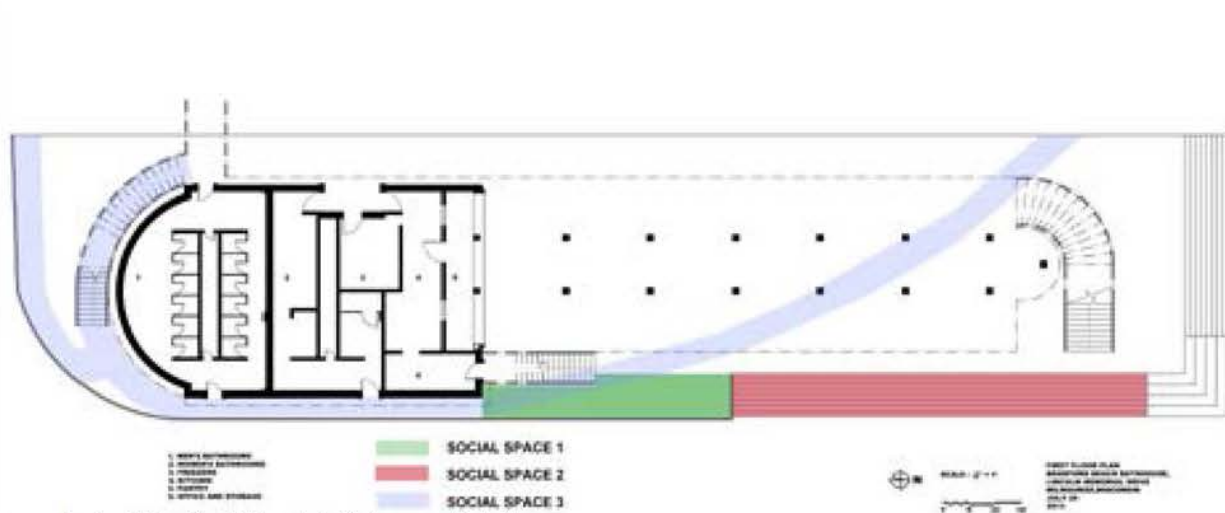
Some go to Bradford Beach as a space to people watch and take pictures from a distance.

## Rhythms of the Bath House

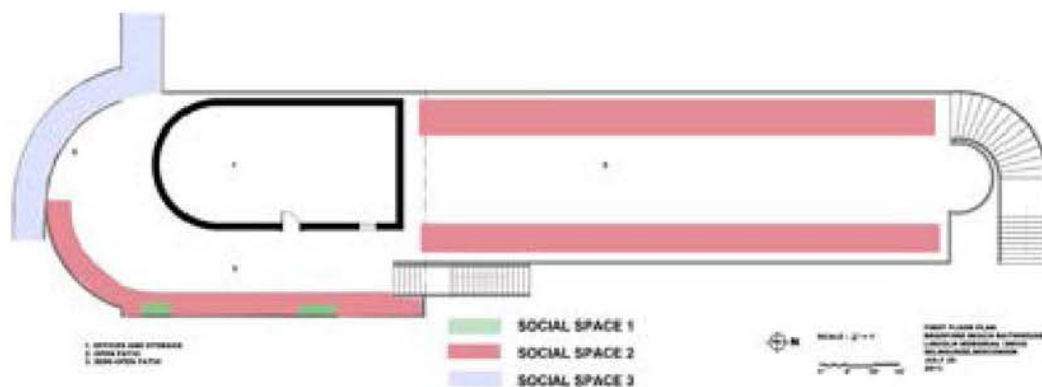
The bath house can be divided into three different social spaces, each with its own tempo. Social Space 1, the green area, has a very slow pace of activities. These areas on the bath house patio and terrace are where beach visitors tend to sit, people-watch, and observe the activities on the beach. Visitors in the green area frequently linger for a few hours.

The steps leading down from the bath house to the beach as well as the edges of the second floor terrace make up Social Space 2, the area marked in red. This area is also where beach visitors stop and watch the activities of the beach and the street. However, this area has a quicker pace than Social Space 1. Instead of staying in the same place all afternoon, visitors in these areas stay while they eat lunch or relax after swimming. They then might move on to another part of the beach or leave the area altogether.

Social Space 3, the areas colored gray, cutting through the bath house patio and going up the stairs, has the quickest movement of the three spaces. This area marks a path that is taken by those simply passing through the bath house. These visitors are usually using the biking/walking path that runs along Bradford Beach. Sometimes these visitors might stop at the bath house to use the restrooms or the concession stand, but frequently they simply pass by without stopping at all.



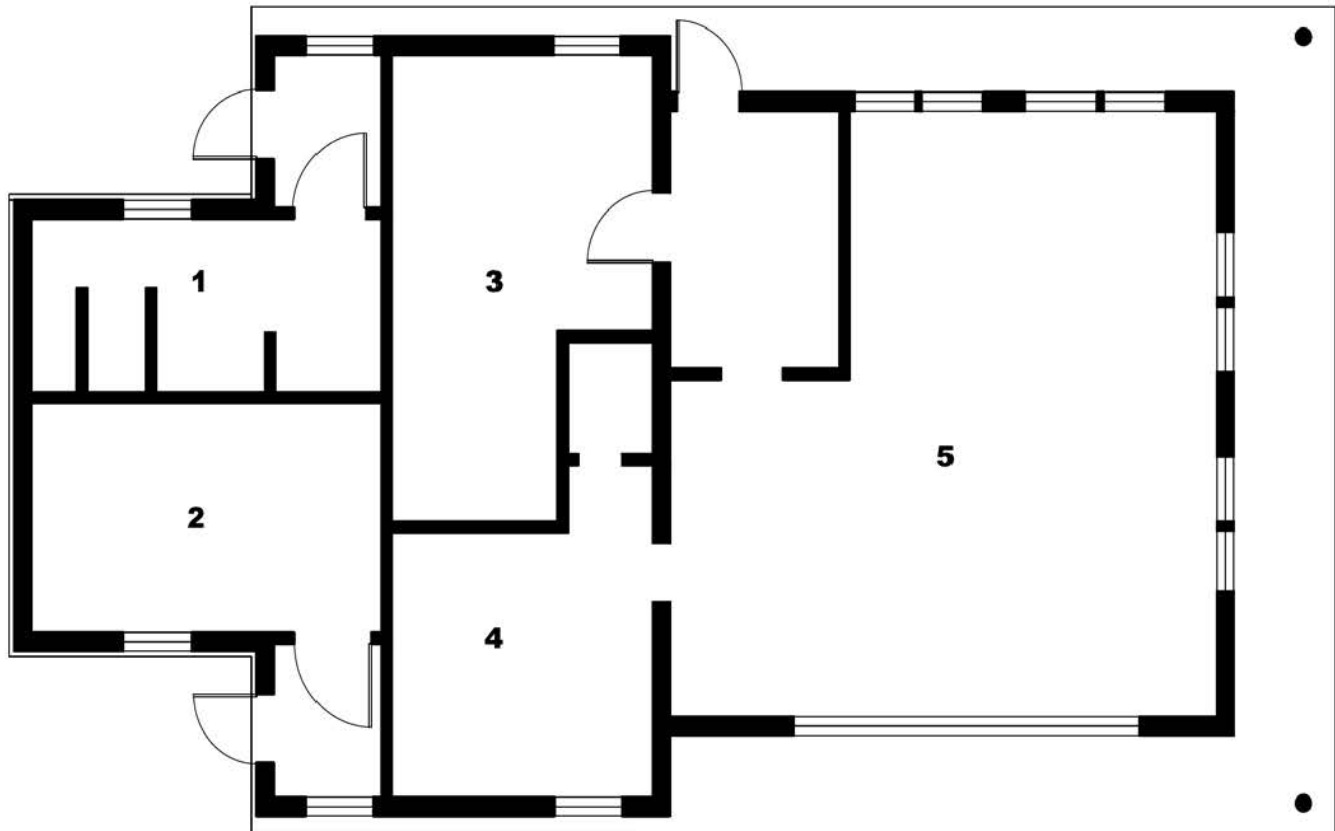
Space analysis of Bradford Beach bath house, first floor.



Space analysis Bradford Beach bath house, second floor.



# NORTH POINT CUSTARD STAND



- 1. MEN'S BATHROOMS
- 2. WOMEN'S BATHROOMS
- 3. FREEZERS
- 4. OFFICE AND STORAGE
- 5. KITCHEN



SCALE :  $\frac{1}{16}'' = 1'$



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
NORTH POINT CUSTARD STAND,  
LINCOLN MEMORIAL DRIVE  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN  
JULY 29  
2013

Floor plan of the North Point Custard Stand.



# Custard Stand History

The North Point Custard Stand is located to the south end of Bradford Beach and has been open for four years. The building houses a kitchen, pantry, a small office, storage space, and men's and women's bathrooms. The building is very lively due to its large, red fabric canopy and its painted siding. Adjoining the building is a queue space where customers place the orders, and a paved area with benches and tables shaded by umbrellas. The surrounding area is lined with trees and shrubbery, helping form an edge to an adjacent parking lot.

The North Point Custard Stand sits between Bradford Beach and McKinley Beach. In the 1960s, very few trees existed on this part of the lakefront. A small hot dog stand existed in this place which was later replaced by the custard stand. To this day, the North Point Custard Stand and the surrounding area continues to be an attraction for the residents of the nearby Historic Water Tower neighborhood.



## A Quick Retreat

The North Point Custard Stand is run by the Bartolotta Restaurant Group and sells Bartolotta food and custard. Since the Bartolottas took over North Point Custard in 2009, visitors have raved about the good food sold there. North Point Custard is a place favored by those looking for a spot to eat by the lake where they won't get sand in their food.

Compared to Bradford Beach, the North Point Custard Stand is a more family-oriented and controlled area. There are designated areas for ordering food, picking up orders, and eating. Plants identify the edge between the restaurant area and the parking lot. The Custard Stand is situated so all of this activity takes place on the opposite side of the building from the beach. This makes the North Point Custard Stand's link to the city of Milwaukee stronger than that of Bradford Beach. The Custard Stand attracts people from the city for a quick lunch or a break from work, and is purposefully built close to the road and downtown.

# BEACH OBJECTS



The volleyball area of Bradford Beach, clearly visible by the “walls” of volleyball nets.



A lifeguard chair and the space around it that has been left open by beach-goers.



# Making a Mark

In addition to the buildings on Bradford Beach, there are a number of other man-made or influenced objects on the beach. The cabanas, shade umbrellas, and volleyball nets are there to help beach-goers have a more enjoyable time. The rocks along the edge of the beach, trash cans, warning signs, and the lifeguard chairs are there to make the beach a safer place for visitors. Each object, regardless of its primary function, also serves another, less obvious function: that of a boundary marker. These boundaries are not necessarily physical barriers preventing any type of movement across them (though in the case of the boulders bordering the beach, this is a main function); instead, these objects help to delineate the different social areas on the beach that already exist.

The tables next to the Tiki bar, mark the extent of the Tiki bar's space. Beyond the tables are the volleyball courts. The cabana marks another area of the beach, this time with an actual rope fence. The cabana area allows beach-goers the opportunity to rent shaded chairs and beach activity equipment, and to be waited on by servers. Though perhaps only 150 feet from the Tiki bar, the cabana area of the beach is clearly distinguished as a very different space, one where visitors can relax in privacy. A perhaps less obvious type of boundary is one created by the lifeguard chairs and the trash cans. These objects are there to serve the beach-goers and they make the beach a better and safer place. The trash cans are used by all beach-goers, but by their very nature, tend to repel people from sitting or playing nearby. Similarly, the lifeguards and lifeguard chairs are an important part of beach safety, but as a "working" object, visitors tend to keep their distance.



Line stretched in the sand demarkating the edges of the volleyball court



The cabana rental area, with the shaded lounge chairs that provide beach-goers with a sense of privacy.



These large boulders were placed at the south end of Bradford Beach and help to mark the end of the beach as well as prevent erosion.



# THE BLUFF



A view looking northwest from Lincoln Memorial Drive.



A staircase connecting Lincoln Memorial Drive to the top of the bluff.

Historically, the bluff marked the edge of city; it was the last bit of land before Lake Michigan. This changed when the shoreline was extended into Lake Michigan for a shore drive and a new landfilled beach. The bluff then came to serve as the edge of the beach. At this point, the bluff changed from being an edge to being an extended spatial and social zone that intervened between the neighborhood and the beach.

The bluff still divides the city (an urban area) from the beach (a natural area, albeit a man-made one). It attracts people from both the city and the beach, making it an area where strangers meet and interact.



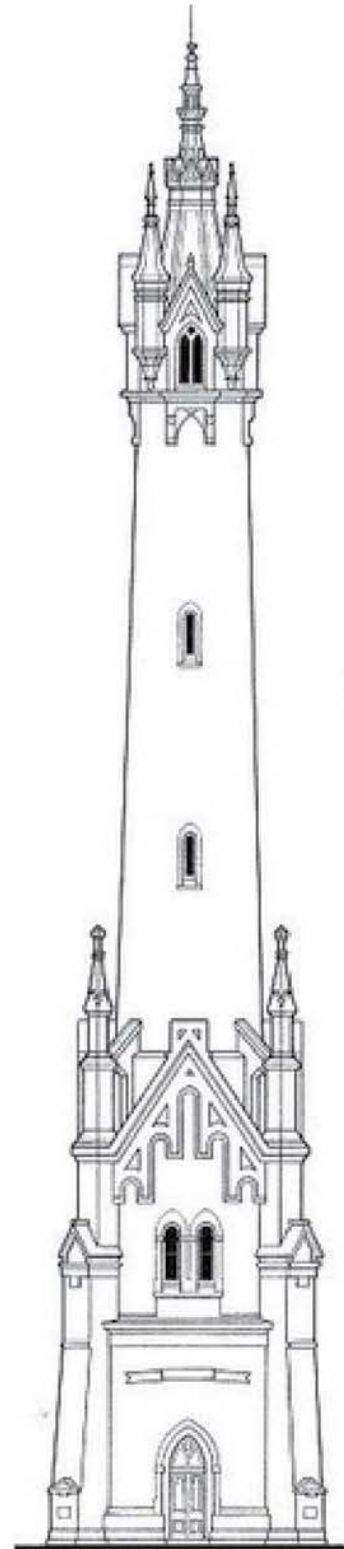
The erosion of the bluff near the 1854 North Point Lighthouse.



# HISTORIC WATER TOWER



The Historic Water Tower, built in 1873, after which the surrounding neighborhood is named.



Cross section and plans of the water tower (Courtesy of the Historic American Buildings Survey)..

In its early years, Milwaukee did not have a city-wide water system. Instead, residents had to get their water from wells, cisterns, or the rivers. By the second half of the 19th century, city officials began looking into a water system for Milwaukee. After years of delays, the first Milwaukee water works buildings were built from 1872-1874. This included a water intake crib in Lake Michigan, a pumping station, and a water tower.

The original North Point Pumping Station was located directly northwest of the current pumping station and housed the pumps which drew water from Lake Michigan and sent it to the city. The pumping station underwent a number of additions and expansions in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. It was finally replaced in the 1960s with the current North Point Pumping Station.

Though called a water tower, the North Point water tower is not what we may expect. Instead of holding a large quantity of water, the North Point water tower houses a standpipe. The pumps used in the original North Point Pumping Station operated with a piston-like motion. This created surges in the water pressure and therefore an inconsistent flow in the city's water mains. The standpipe inside the water tower served as a buffer between the pumping station and the water mains, eliminating the water pressure surges before the water entered the mains.

The water tower, designed in the Gothic style by Charles Gombert, was built in 1873 and stands 175 feet tall. It was chosen as a national landmark for the American Water Works Association in 1969 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. The water tower is part of a much bigger water system that also includes Bradford Beach, the North Point Lighthouse, the North Point Area and the bluff leading down to the lake shore.



The original North Point Pumping Station, with the water tower in the background (Courtesy of the Historic American Buildings Survey).

Elmer C. Becker, *A Century of Milwaukee Water: An Historical Account of the Origin and Development of the Milwaukee Water Works*, (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Water Works, 1974).

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Historic American Buildings Survey, Washington, D.C.



# NORTH POINT LIGHTHOUSE

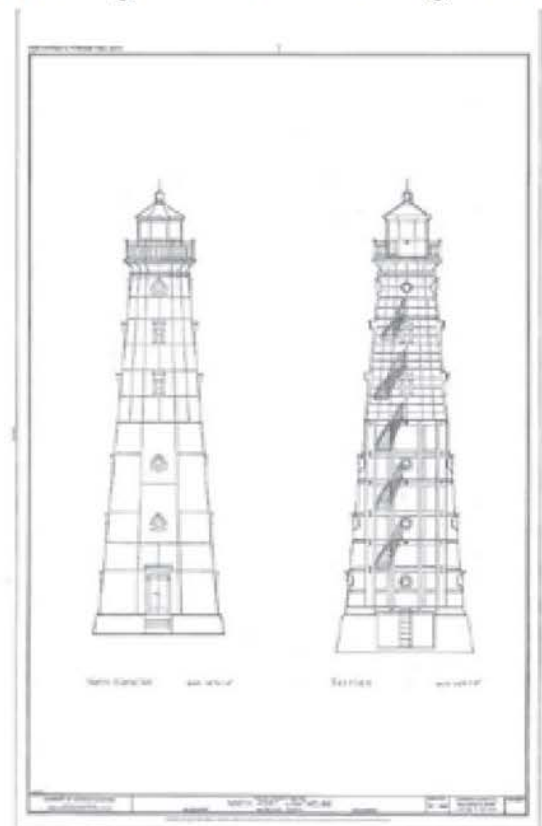


The North Point Lighthouse is located in Lake Park in the Historic Water Tower neighborhood. A lighthouse has existed on the property since 1854 and the current lighthouse was built in 1888. It was in operation until 1994. After sitting empty for a few years, the lighthouse was restored between 2004-2007 and is now a museum and exhibition space open to the public. The North Point Lighthouse is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Milwaukee's first lighthouse was located at the end of Wisconsin Avenue, where the Milwaukee Art Museum is currently located. This was not an ideal location as the beacon was difficult to see. In 1854, a new lighthouse was built on North Point, a site chosen because of its height on the bluff above Lake Michigan. However, it was built too close to the edge of the bluff, and soon erosion threatened the lighthouse. In 1888, a new lighthouse was built about 100 feet further back from the edge of the bluff. By 1912, the trees in Lake Park had grown too tall and were obscuring the light. In response to this, an addition was added to the base of the lighthouse tower, raising it to its current height of 74 feet.



The lighthouse today (looking northwest, towards the North Point neighborhood).



Cross section of the North Point Lighthouse after the 1912 addition, raising the lighthouse to its current height (Courtesy of the Historical American Buildings Survey).

Mark Kuehn, interview by Niyati Naik and Jonathan Schaefer, Milwaukee, June 17, 2013.

John Scripp, interview by Jonathan Schaefer and Maia Stack, Milwaukee, June 18, 2013.

North Point Lighthouse Museum Collections, Milwaukee.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Historic American Buildings Survey, Washington, D.C.



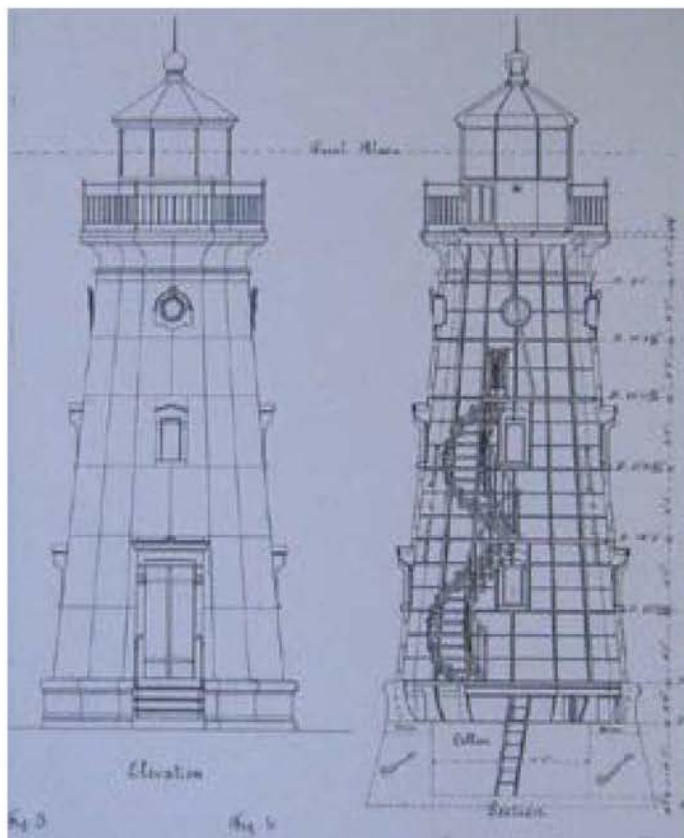
# Evolution

The North Point Lighthouse has undergone a transformation in recent years. Not only has it been restored, but it also has been turned into a museum. The transformation of the lighthouse mirrors changes taking place throughout Milwaukee. In the 19th and early-20th centuries, Milwaukee was home to huge industries and manufacturing plants. In recent years, the number of manufacturing jobs decreased, and instead, Milwaukee gained more tourist destinations. As with the lighthouse, the city shifted from a very industrial place to a place that is geared towards the visitors.

Within a new tourist economy, the North Point Lighthouse serves as a gateway to the history of Milwaukee and Lake Michigan as well as to the memories of its residents. Visitors to the lighthouse are able to learn about the history of the Port of Milwaukee, the growth of the city, and the lighthouse itself. Similarly, the lighthouse (as a building) no longer commands the function of the past. Originally the building was important to immigrants and merchant vessels. The lighthouse keeper maintained the beacon at the top of the tower guiding sailors safely into port. Now the building is important to tourists because of the information and knowledge held within its exhibits and its views of Lake Park of Milwaukee and Lake Michigan.



Sketched drawing of the original lighthouse built at North Point in 1854.



An elevation, cross section, and floor plans of the North Point Lighthouse tower as it existed in 1888.



# LAKE PARK



Lake Park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the creator of Central Park in New York City. While in Milwaukee, Olmsted also designed River Park (now Riverside Park), Newberry Boulevard, and Washington Park. The majority of Lake Park was completed by 1894, though many features have been added or updated in subsequent years.

The park was designed to be used as a natural retreat from urban life. Though there are areas to play and sit, much of the park is given to walking trails or natural beauty. There are also vista points where one can stop and watch the activity on Lake Michigan.



Looking south towards Lake Park and Milwaukee from the North Point Lighthouse, 1923.



A bridge crossing one of the ravines in Lake Park, 1894



One of the ravines, 1895.



Detail of a lion on the Lion Bridge, after undergoing restoration.

# BLUFF OBJECTS



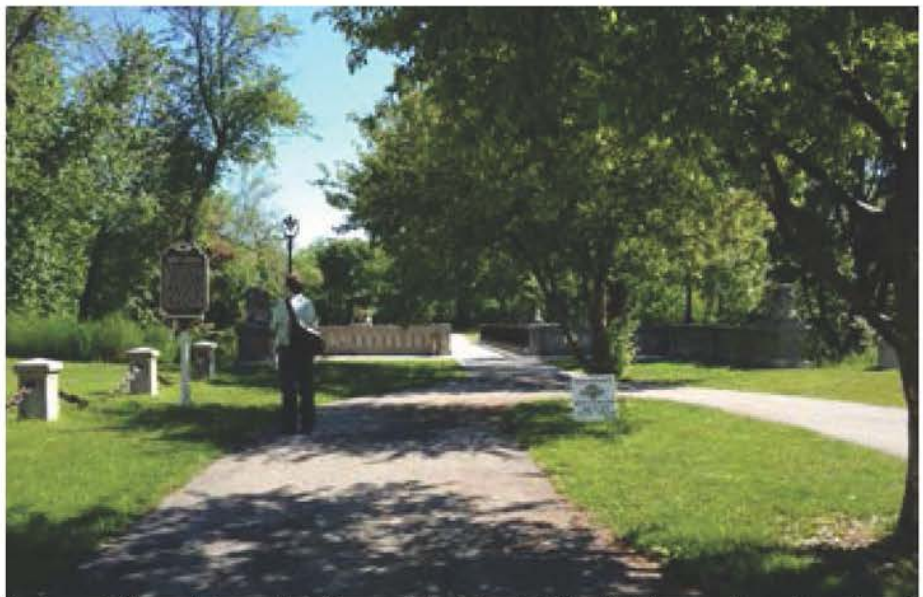
Objects found on the bluff tend to have different purposes than those found on the beach. There are still trash cans and fences, but there is more thought given to aesthetics.

A paved walking path runs along the bluff, giving visitors to Lake Park an easy access through the park. Bridges over the ravines in Lake Park are guarded by large, decorative lion statues. A chain fence marks the division between the walking path and the grounds of the North Point Lighthouse, similar to the rope surrounding the cabana area on Bradford Beach.

While some of the objects are similar to those on the beach, they provide a much different feel to the bluff. The bluff is a much calmer and more relaxed space than the beach, but at the same time is grander in scale. Where the beach attracts people with the activities it can provide, the bluff is more likely to attract people with its beautiful scenery.



The decorative chain used as a fence to identify the edge of the lighthouse grounds.



A view of the walking path in front of the North Point Lighthouse along the edge of the bluff in Lake Park.



# ECOLOGY: BLUFF AND BEACH



Though very different spaces, the bluff and Bradford Beach are inextricably linked through their shared ecology. For hundreds of years, storms, waves, and natural runoff eroded away the bluff at the edge of Lake Michigan and created ravines that cut into the bluff face. This was happening so fast that the North Point Lighthouse had to be moved barely 30 years after it was built to be sure that the bluff did not erode out from under it!

In the 1890s, Lake Park was built along the bluff, but while it improved and beautified the top of the bluff and the ravines, little work was done to the face of the bluff to prevent further erosion. Vegetation slowly grew up to and covered the face of the bluff. In 1905, Bradford Beach and a shore drive (later named Lincoln Memorial Drive) were created to serve as a buffer against the Lake Michigan waves. The beach helped prevent erosion, but a new problem associated with the growing North Point neighborhood arose. As the neighborhood grew larger, more runoff was flowing through the ravines onto the beach and then into Lake Michigan. Not only was this still causing erosion, but this runoff also introduced man-made pollutants into Lake Michigan. Pollution began to cause damage to Lake Michigan and Bradford Beach, occasionally getting bad enough to force the beach to close.

Several years ago, a new drainage system and six rain gardens were added to Bradford Beach along Lincoln Memorial Drive. These rain gardens help to better control the flow of water coming down from the bluffs and limit the amount that spills directly onto the beach. The rain gardens also act as a filter, helping to extract many of the pollutants in the water before they can enter Lake Michigan.





One of the rain gardens along Bradford Beach. This outlet connects to the drains at the base of the bluff across Lincoln Memorial Drive.



A sign explains the function of the rain garden and the actions taken to improve the water and beach conditions at Bradford Beach.



The term main street can be defined in multiple ways. The Wisconsin Main Street Program draws from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's definition as it explains that a main street is a "[place] of shared memory where people still come together to live, work, and play." According to the Main Street Alliance, such streets tend to be associated with small local businesses rather than national chain stores. We regard Downer as the Historic Water Tower neighborhood's main street because it is a place of shared memories and a thoroughfare made of (mostly) small businesses.



# MAIN STREET



# NORTH DOWNER AVENUE



## Downer as the Neighborhood's Main Street

North Downer Avenue commercial district is a two-block retail strip located along North Downer Avenue, between East Park and East Webster Places. It was awarded a local historic designation in 2001. Situated on the west edge of Historic Water Tower neighborhood, this has always been the neighborhood's main street, says Thea Kovac, a long-time resident.

The shops and facilities along Downer were originally built to serve “homeowners and apartment dwellers living on the city’s Upper East Side” from the 1900s to the 1930s. In the recent past, there has been some real estate speculation on commercial properties along Downer. The Downer Avenue shopping district is not immune to major developments that could completely change its character as a neighborhood marketplace. Economic interests have led developers to propose larger residential buildings very close to Downer Avenue, and a boutique hotel on the street. The parking structure is a reminder of new developments in this area.

Over the years, Downer Avenue has always been a part of the neighborhood's life, whether as an everyday shopping district, a public place, or as an endangered historic district.



Belleview Pharmacy & Sentry Foods, 1993. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, AHI 78307.



CVS Pharmacy, 2013.

City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, “Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District” (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 3–4.

Richard Longstreth, “Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 12–23;

National Main Street Center, “What is Main Street,” accessed July 5, 2013, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/#.UdbNvz5YRI8>.



# How we tell stories of Downer

## Place-Based Stories

As we talked to the users of Downer Avenue shopping district, we found that many of their memories and stories were connected to specific locations. We have therefore selected those sites that frequently came up during their interviews.

## Person-Based Stories

People experience Downer in diverse ways. Some people are customers at shops on Downer. The others are members of a church. There are also merchants and businessmen who operate their stores on Downer. These individuals have spent different periods of time on Downer Avenue and they have been at the street at different times during the day. They have experienced changes of seasons and they have attended events held here. They hold different viewpoints and perspectives on this street. The street becomes the locus where these diverse individuals meet and interact with each other. We provide person-based accounts to give you the biographical contexts of the storytellers of Downer.



Downer Avenue.



# GROCERY STORE



Sendiks, 2013.

## Sendiks

Built in 1909, this building is the oldest existing building in the North Downer Avenue commercial district. It has a two-block façade, which was common in the United States circa 1800 to 1950. According to Sal Sendik, the current co-owner of Sendik's on Downer and the first son of the founder Tony Sendik, this store has been operating here since 1933. When Tony Sendik started the store with two of his brothers, he sold only fresh produce while sharing the building with some other stores. Sendik's gradually acquired the neighboring stores, built a one-story greenhouse (on the south side) and a warehouse (at the rear), and it became what it is today.

City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 8

Sal Sendik, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 20, 2013.



Sendik's, 1979. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, AHI 115349



Sendik's entrance.



Sendik's interior.



# HARDWARE STORE



Downer Hardware, 2013.

## Downer Hardware

This building was built in 1912, after houses on the 2600 block of North Downer Avenue were removed. According to their Facebook page, Downer Hardware opened in these premises in 1937. Even though it has been a True Value store for at least 34 years, people still call it simply the “hardware store,” regarding it not as a chain store, but as the local hardware store of the neighborhood.



Downer Hardware, 1979. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, AHI 115350.

Chicago Historical Society, "True Value Hardware," in *Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2979.html>.

City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 5, 12.

Downer Hardware, "About," accessed July 6, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Downer-Hardware/373547192694703?sk=info>; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013.

Thea Kovac, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013.



# ANCHOR PLACE



Original Pancake House, 2013.





## Coffee Trader

According to Margaret Howland and an article in *Milwaukee Journal*, prior to its opening on Downer, Coffee Trader had a store on East Park Place that sold only beans. This old store was located in the current premises of the Sendik's fish market. A new store was built in 1975 and it shared the entrance with Henry's bar and restaurant, which is now located at 2523 East Bellevue Place. There was neither Starbucks nor Alterra in Milwaukee in 1975. Coffee Trader was therefore the place to go for the neighborhood members and more generally, for all Milwaukeeans. Coffee Trader faded in the 1990s. At least three tenants have come in and gone in this location. Now Original Pancake House, VIA Downer and AthletiCo share the building, but maintain separate entrances.



Milwaukee Journal: Accent on the Weekend, April 27, 1984, 1.

Notes: Alterra, "History," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.alterracoffee.com/AboutUs.aspx>; Jeff Beutner, "Via Downer: Light Meals in an Attractive Setting," *Express Milwaukee*, June 29, 2010, <http://expressmilwaukee.com/article-11406-via-downer-light-meals-in-an-attractive-setting.html>; City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 7–9; Tom Daykin, "Bringing up Downer," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 8, 2007, <http://www.jsonline.com/business/29355194.html>; Dennis R. Getto, "Fine dining returning to Downer," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 15, 2005, 3D; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Thea Kovac, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Dave Lührssen, "The Jewel of Downer Mall," *Milwaukee Journal: Accent on the Weekend*, April 27, 1984, 1, 4; Starbucks Coffee Company, "Starbucks Company Timeline," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.starbucks.com/assets/e56b2a6b08244aaab0632dc6ac25ad0d.pdf>; Molly Snyder, "Longtime server reflects on the iconic Coffee Trader," *On Milwaukee*, June 17, 2013, <http://www.onmilwaukee.com/dining/articles/mariycoffeetrader.html>; Cynthia Sommer, "AthletiCo Milwaukee Eastside – New on Downer," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://murrayhillna.org/business/athletico/>; Susan Willets, interview by Fran Assa, Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 18, 2013. Notes: Alterra, "History," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.alterracoffee.com/AboutUs.aspx>; Jeff Beutner, "Via Downer: Light Meals in an Attractive Setting," *Express Milwaukee*, June 29, 2010, <http://expressmilwaukee.com/article-11406-via-downer-light-meals-in-an-attractive-setting.html>; City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 7–9; Tom Daykin, "Bringing up Downer," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 8, 2007, <http://www.jsonline.com/business/29355194.html>; Dennis R. Getto, "Fine dining returning to Downer," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 15, 2005, 3D; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Thea Kovac, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Dave Lührssen, "The Jewel of Downer Mall," *Milwaukee Journal: Accent on the Weekend*, April 27, 1984, 1, 4; Starbucks Coffee Company, "Starbucks Company Timeline," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.starbucks.com/assets/e56b2a6b08244aaab0632dc6ac25ad0d.pdf>; Molly Snyder, "Longtime server reflects on the iconic Coffee Trader," *On Milwaukee*, June 17, 2013, <http://www.onmilwaukee.com/dining/articles/mariycoffeetrader.html>; Cynthia Sommer, "AthletiCo Milwaukee Eastside – New on Downer," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://murrayhillna.org/business/athletico/>; Susan Willets, interview by Fran Assa, Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 18, 2013.





Surveyed in 2013. Café next door is no longer there.

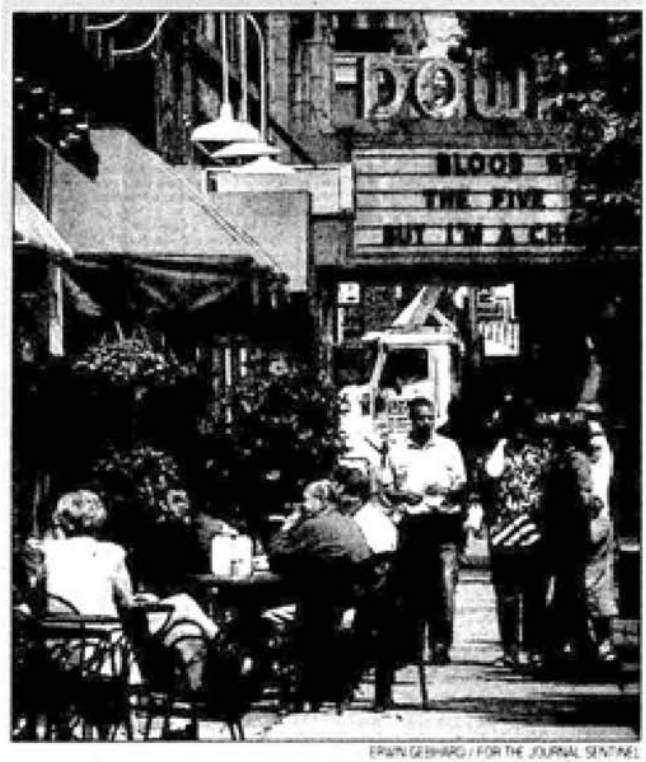
## Downer Theatre

Built in 1915, the building has always housed Downer Theatre, though its ownership has changed several times. This oldest existing commercial member of the North Downer Avenue Commercial District originally showed silent movies with a Weickhardt pipe organ, a Sohmer piano, or an in-house orchestra. Eventually it began showing movies with sound. The Downer Theater was acquired by Landmark Theatres in 1989 and remodeled into a two-screener with a digital sound system.





Theatre seats.



**The Downer Ave.** business district includes restaurants, specialty shops, a bookstore and the Downer Theatre.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, February 24, 2006, 3D.



Theatre view from the rear.

Notes: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 5, 10–12, 15; Thomas P. Donegan, "HEREAS Downer Theatre," May 8, 1990; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Cynthia Sommer, "History of Downer Theatre," accessed July 3, 2013, <http://murrayhillna.org/aboutus/neighborhood-history/history-of-downer-theatre/>; Landmark Theatres, "Downer Theatre," accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.landmarktheatres.com/market/milwaukee/downertheatre.htm>.



# USE OF PUBLIC SPACE



Popcorn wagon, 2006. Courtesy of Michael Newman.

## Nelson's Popcorn Wagon

Built in 1916, Nelson's popcorn wagon was on East Bellevue Place and North Downer Avenue until 2007. As one of the oldest popcorn wagons in the United States, it was noted as a "contributing structure" upon the district's local designation (2001). However, the removal was approved by the Milwaukee Preservation Commission upon the construction of the four-storied parking garage. The popcorn wagon still sits in people's memory, with a strong fragrance of popcorn: salty, sweet, and buttery.





Former popcorn wagon site, 2013.



References: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 3, 5–6, 11; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Jenna Kashou, "The Lost Wagon," Milwaukee Magazine January 2010, 22; Nik Kovac, interview by John Annis and Chelsea Wait, Milwaukee, June 21, 2013; Thelma "Queen Tillie" Kamuchey, Jim Hanley, *Fractured Tales of Milwaukee's Eastside: A True Story about the Germans, the Poles, the Irish, the Jews, the Italians and the Greeks* (Bloomington: Author House, 2010), 112.





St. Marks Episcopal Church, 2013.

## St. Mark's Episcopal Church

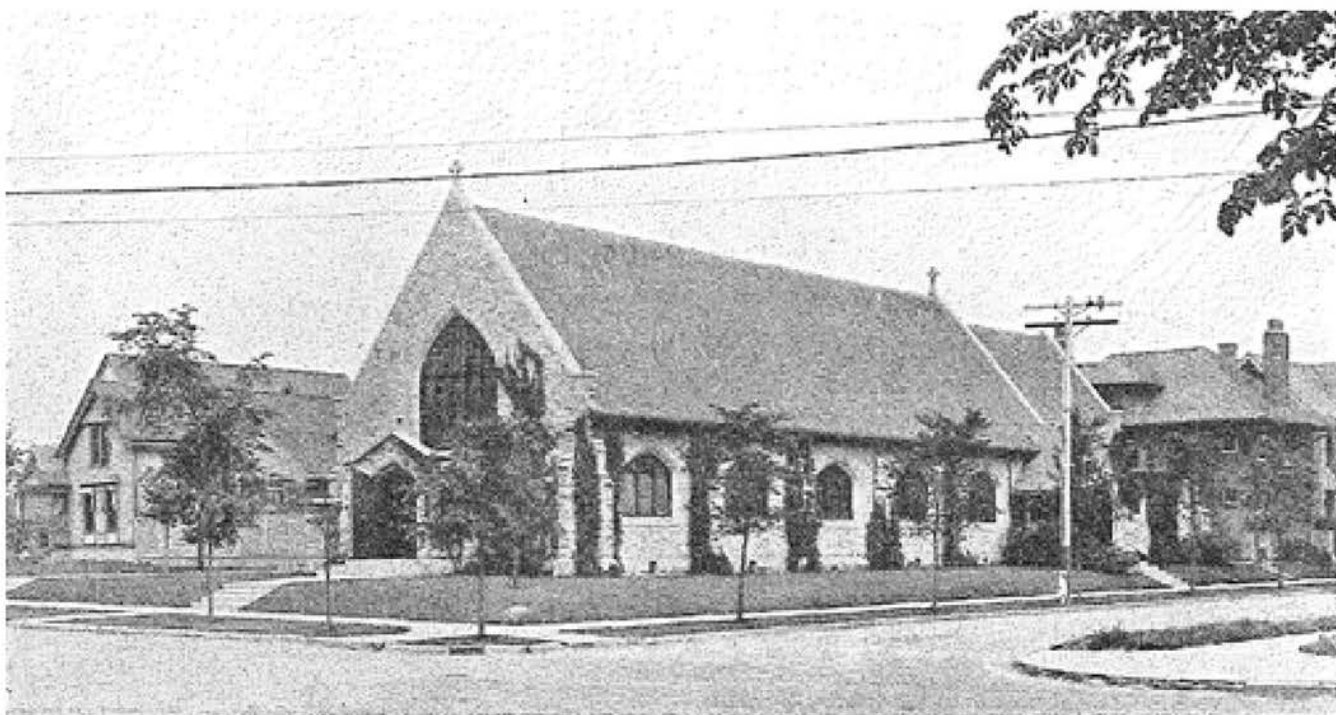
St. Mark's was originally formed as a Mission congregation in 1893 and had its first small chapel on Greenwich and Maryland in 1894. The current masonry chapel was constructed on North Hackket Avenue and East Bellevue Place in 1912, after the wooden chapel on the same site was demolished in 1911. Although it was equipped with a guild hall, with more than one thousand members at the time of World War II, the church decided to have a new parish hall in 1949. Open to a diverse population, the church now also functions as a community center.



Church doors.



Church walkway.



St. Mark's Episcopal Church, ca 1912–1918. Reproduced from *St. Mark's Episcopal Church*, 15.

Notes: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 8–9, 14–15; St. Mark's Episcopal Church, *St. Mark's Episcopal Church Centennial Celebration 1893–1993*; id., *The Parish Outlook* 10 7 (1918), 15; Stacy Roller, interview by Fran Assa, Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 18, 2013.



# AUTOMOBILE GARAGE

## Downer Garage

In the early motor car era or the automobile age (1916), this building was built “to store, service and sell automobiles.” Early automobiles could not be parked outside because they were expensive and they were not weather-resistant. They also needed frequent services by technicians. This garage was built to serve “well-to-do East Siders” who owned motor cars at that moment.

The first floor is now occupied by retail stores and the upper floors are used as storage for these retail shops.



Downer Garage, 1993. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, AHI 78302.



Downer Lakeview Commons, 2013.

## Mulkern's Garage

In 1912, Mulkern's Garage was built to meet the needs of the motor car owners in the surrounding residential area. Mulkern's Garage sold, kept, repaired and rented early automobiles for the neighborhood residents. They were especially known for repairing electronic cars, which were very popular among well-to-do people in the 1910s.

The first floor was converted to ten individual retail stores in 1933. The current residents of the neighborhood tend to have memories about these retail stores, rather than the early garage.



Mulkern's Garage, 1979. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, AHI 115351.



Mulkern's Garage, 2013.

Notes: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, "Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District" (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 4, 7, 11–13; Margaret Howland, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013; Rinka Chung Architecture, "Downer Avenue Mulkern's Building Addition and Renovation," (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2009), 3–4.





## Talking about Downer

Stories of Downer are told from diverse perspectives. We have talked to a developer, a merchant, residents and workers in Downer. Some personal perspectives contradicted each other, and others overlapped. This section examines this complex and heterogenous collective perspective on Downer Avenue. While we have incorporated these personal and collective memories into place-based stories, we have also provided biographies, based primarily on oral histories, in order to give you the personal contexts of the storytellers of Downer.







## Margaret Howland

Margaret Martin Elsner Howland lived in the Historic Water Tower neighborhood until she moved out of state for her senior high school. Residing only two blocks away from the Downer Avenue commercial district, she spent a substantial amount of time in Downer as a child in the 1960s and 1970s.

Howland remembers how she grew up in the neighborhood. Knowing most of the clerks by first name and the owners by name, she considers, “I was brought up by a community of people.” Even when she did not have something specific to do on Downer, she passed through Downer and said hello to her mother’s hairdresser, Leoda. Cashiers at Sendik’s let her try the cash register. Having an “account” at each store on Downer, she could make small purchases, such as her mother’s birthday card, on credit – a clerk said, “I know you’re Elsner.”

Although she was away from Milwaukee for several years, she now lives close to Downer and still frequents some of the stores: Sendik’s, Downer Hardware and Paperwork. Asked what Downer means to her, she replies, “There’s definitely emotional attachment. This is where I grew up.”



## Vince Katter

Vince Katter has seen Downer Avenue change over the last 25 years as a dedicated parishioner at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

There has been a revival on Downer Avenue. Katter believes the area has changed from "being a place for the wealthy." After a downturn in the neighborhood, when "a lot of houses became rooming houses," it has revived as "a nice place to live." The former Coffee Trader building stood empty for a long time, but now that space, and Downer Avenue as a whole, are experiencing a "retail renaissance" as more people continue to move to the East Side, and the economy improves.

There has been a revival in church activities as well. The local church members are joined by others who travel to the neighborhood for church from other areas. Times have changed and people are no longer "expected" to go to church, but there are still numerous activities that gather the congregation in this building. The church has a large hall and ten years ago it redefined what to do with that space. It has transformed into a center for meetings, events, groups, and classes. A UWM cooking class experiments in the St. Mark's kitchen, which is "fun to watch."





## Thea Kovac

Thea Kovac compares the place of Downer Avenue in the neighborhood to a kind of small town “Main Street.” She should know. Kovac, who is a vice president of the Historic Water Tower Neighborhood association (HWTN), has lived in a home that abuts the Downer commercial block east of Downer theater since 1975.

When Kovac thinks about how to describe the shopping district, she recalls a particular walk she took that brought her to the street from an unaccustomed direction. Seeing it suddenly from a new angle caused a moment of dislocation and wonder: she suddenly felt she was walking into some small charming European town. Kovac is not overly fanciful; that is exactly how the street is described in a 2001 City of Milwaukee study which resulted in the designation of the two commercial blocks as an historic district: “The character of the district is reminiscent of a small European village because at its center lies a picturesque church complex and clustered around it are a variety of small commercial buildings.”

Kovac has worked hard over the years to see that the Downer Avenue commercial area continues to be a place of “small commercial buildings.” To Kovac, the stores offer a unique kind of commercial environment that is neighborly. She knows the shopkeepers, and they know her. They know her children as well, and some of them saw her children grow up. The shopkeepers have a stake in the neighborhood and in their relationships with the residents. She calls it an “important” and “synergistic” relationship.

Kovac believes that recent developers betrayed this relationship when they got permission to build the large, multi-story parking lot across from the movie theater. The developers “cared nothing about the neighbors.” The neighborhood association fought the parking structure but lost, despite the historic district designation. Kovac argues that it is not a good practice to have a general development plan for such a little neighborhood area, and worries that other large developments will ruin the character of the neighborhood that the historic designation was supposed to preserve.

Thea Kovac relates many of the charms of living in the district, and has vivid memories of taking her kids to nearby Lake Park, and the excitement that the Coffee Trader brought to the neighborhood. When she first moved to the neighborhood the corner drugstore still had a functioning soda counter, and the owner talked about having met his future wife at the fountain. Downer has changed over the years to more of an entertainment and restaurant area, but she hopes the neighborliness between storekeepers and shoppers will continue.

•City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, “Final Historic Designation Study Report: North Downer Avenue Commercial District” (Milwaukee: Historic Preservation Commission, 2001), 10–11, 14.

•Thea Kovac, interview by Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 19, 2013.





## Michelle Mooney

Just off Downer Avenue is a three story apartment building, built at the same time as the stores on Downer, in the 1920s. In one of the apartments, now converted to beautiful condos, lives an ordained minister with a remarkable record of social activism. She has been Deacon of St. Mark's church across the street for the last ten years since her ordination, but she has been a socially committed resident of the Downer Avenue neighborhood and the city of Milwaukee for much longer. Michelle Mooney, a vigorous woman with well-cut grey-white hair, sharp blue eyes that concentrate on what you are saying, and a no-nonsense, yet modest demeanor, has an inspiring record of social justice work. She was the first Executive Director of The Gathering, Milwaukee's premier volunteer group providing meals and other services to the hungry since 1982. She now serves as a board member of Common Ground and the newly formed Common Ground Healthcare Cooperative formed out of the Accountable Care Act. Starting January 1, 2014, the Healthcare Cooperative will offer low cost health care statewide to those who cannot otherwise purchase it. Yet she is just as involved with the Downer Avenue community, where she has created a neighborhood produce garden on unused church lawn. The garden is a place where neighbors can come to meet and work together, while raising organic produce. Mooney's blue eyes light up when talking about the hours she spends in the garden with her neighbors.

Asked if she has an opinion on how to improve the neighborhood, she replies that while the neighborhood is not "heaven on earth," it comes close. It is an area "well served"—from the amenities of Lake Park to the local library which will be moving into fine new quarters. While some families who might have stayed in the neighborhood have moved to the suburbs, the neighborhood continues to thrive as more people appreciate the features of the neighborhood. As she put it, "I love Downer."





## Sal Sendik

In his 78 years in the neighborhood, Sal Sendik has seen a lot of things come and go on Downer Avenue, where he has worked in his father's grocery, Sendik's, since age twelve. At fifteen, he graduated from Marquette High School and at age sixteen he was put in charge of the store while his father took off for Italy for three months. While he has a degree from Marquette University and served in the military, Sendik has been devoted to the store ever since, along with his son Tony Sendik.

Sendik often turns the conversation to his father, whose memory he reveres. His father came to America as a child from Sicily. He and his four brothers, their last name was Balistreri, settled in the Third Ward, living in a house so small that they had to work and sleep in shifts. His father had a minimal education and went to work selling fruit along the streetcar lines. Soon he bought a truck and delivered produce to his customers, carrying the orders to their doorsteps. One lady he delivered to noticed that he was limping and suggested he open a store so she could come to him, instead of him delivering to her. Even when delivering produce Sendik's father had a knack for attracting interesting people. The woman who made the suggestion was the sister-in-law of the world famous violinist, Jascha Heifetz.

At her suggestion, Sendik's father and his brothers opened a store on Oakland and Capitol in 1929. By 1933 Sendik's father and two of the brothers leased space for selling produce at an A & P on Downer Avenue (the A & P sold only packaged goods.)

The Downer store had a well-to-do clientele. Sendik remembers some ladies who arrived at the store by limousines, driven by their chauffeurs. The chauffeurs would wait while the ladies shopped and then got into the back seat. His father was able to buy the shops of adjacent small businesses and expanded Sendik's to the current size.

In his interview with the BLC field school Sal Sendik divulges the secret of how the Balistreris came to be called Sendik. There is a clue in one of the shop windows of the store.

Sal Sendik's father never stopped learning and reading. He was a lover of art and opera, and his clientele appreciated talking with him. "Everybody respected my father," Sendik says. At the back of the store, one might see his father in a deep discussion with one of the neighborhood's wealthy industrialists, perched on an apple crate. Sendik misses his father. "He was smartest man I knew. An honest, honorable man."





## Susan Willets

A chance request from the Priest of St. Mark's Episcopal Church became a life changing event for artist Susan Willets. The church had received an endowment to be used for art exhibition space, and Willets, who is a member of the church, was asked to hang the art. With her connections to artists in the area she promoted the church space as a place for artists to introduce and sell their work to the public. Now she is in charge of the art gallery and mounts an art exhibition every two months, a challenge that has brought her into broader contact with the Milwaukee art scene. As part of her volunteer duties, she hangs the shows, with the guidance of the artists, advertises the exhibitions in the Journal-Sentinel's "Weekend Cue," the church website and newsletter, and MARN-- the Milwaukee Artist Resource Network. She also organizes and hosts the receptions.

Each show lasts for two months, at the cost of only \$35, and 10% commission on sales, which go to the church. The works are exhibited in a large, bright hall, and two more walls in a corridor. The artists invite their friends and followers for a reception at the church, elaborate or simple, for which they provide food and drink. St Mark's supplies wine glasses, coffee, flatware and china, flowers, set up and clean up. Steve Woolf, the church's music director, and a bass playing parishioner, can play jazz music for the shows on Sundays. Willets greatly enjoys these receptions, and getting to know the artists and meeting their friends. The experience has helped her grow as an artist.

Willets tries to bring variety to her choice of shows, and at least one show a year has multiple artists whose work is selected around a theme. Since St Mark's has gained a reputation as artist-friendly, Willets is now contacted by artists wishing to exhibit. She gets great pleasure seeing the parishioners and guests enjoy the art, and believes the artists are also pleased with the sales. In her opinion this is a church that really supports the arts, which she finds unusual.

Willet's own background is mostly in pastel work. She also does landscape and still life paintings in watercolor. She is co-chairman of Wisconsin Visual Arts and a member of Wisconsin Pastel Artists, and has exhibited throughout the area.





## Blair Williams

Blair Williams is a young commercial real estate developer who sees himself as a person who understands both the necessity of development and the significance of historic preservation. He is a person with some financial power, but more important, significant political power, because he sits on the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, which has jurisdiction over the buildings and neighborhoods designated as “historic” in Milwaukee. This includes the Water Tower neighborhood. Williams also lives in the locality but is not involved in its neighborhood preservation organization.

In his office overlooking the corner of North Avenue and Farwell, Blair Williams, discusses his philosophy of commercial real estate development. He owns no property on Downer, although he has made an unsuccessful bid. He is the developer of two residential/commercial buildings on the north end of Oakland Avenue in the heart of the neighborhood in Shorewood. He says that his philosophy in those two developments was to understand that a major structure in a neighborhood must appeal not only to customers and users of the commercial space, but to those people who live nearby, or walk or ride their bikes past the building.

A visit to these structures reveals that they have set backs from the street, allowing passers by mingle with patrons at outdoor air dining areas, or explore take in the offerings in the shop windows as they pass. The commercial areas are divided into small shops that appeal to the senses: a local coffee vender, a wine tasting establishment, a frozen yogurt shop, a restaurant. Most importantly, the height of the building and the structural materials used do not draw undue attention or overwhelm the street. They fit the neighboring structures in size and material, without mimicking them. They are architecturally interesting. People accept the buildings as good neighbors.





## Stephen Wolff

Parents claim that it's easy to get their children to attend Sunday services at St. Mark's Episcopal Church because of the music. The music is the product of a remarkable man named Stephen Wolff; and Stephen Wolff, as he tells it, is the product of advanced musical training, and an unusual upbringing that stressed music, literature, and religious devotion. As music director of St. Mark's, Wolff not only provides organ and piano music for the services, but he also performs at many church events, composes original music, creates jazz versions of traditional hymns, leads the choir, and has even brought in a range of musicians to perform at a concert series for the whole community. Additionally Wolff and these "musicians in residence" provide music lessons at the church on a variety of instruments. When not doing all of the above, Wolff is putting the finishing touches on a book of 100 Sonnets.

If Stephen Wolff seems to overflow with creativity, his upbringing is probably the cause. Wolff is one of 17 children born to the marriage of a piano teacher mother and a Marquette University seminarian, both very devout Roman Catholics who made sure their children were surrounded by and in touch with spiritual and artistic beauty.

Every child had a musical instrument, music lessons, books and pets. There was no TV. Every day was infused with spirituality in the form of daily mass, saying the Rosary every night, and reading spiritual texts. The children participated in gardening, canning food and raising chickens. Every child was given a college education at Marquette University.

To Wolff, music is a way of living a life of the imagination. Music and poetry bring one into association with perfection, and perfection has an influence on the soul. At St. Marks, he feels blessed to be surrounded by the beauty of the church and a friendly body of people. Wolff lives just west of Downer Avenue. The Concert Series offers a variety of music once a month during academic year. Wolff performs three solo concerts in the Series and also accompanies the other performers, and pronounces the church's acoustics "wonderful."

Stephen Wolff, interview by Fran Assa, Daniel Cho and Yuko Nakamura, Milwaukee, June 18, 2013.



The meaning of home and its architecture varies with people and generations. A home serves different social functions and its interiors can hold many worlds under a single roof. Homes can be sites of daily domestic life or labor, be it childrearing or cooking. They can be iconic and the owner may present her identity to a larger world through her home. Homes can serve as commodities with unstable resale value in a real estate marketplace or be valued as esthetically crafted object. Homes are repositories of individual and family memories and testament to the historical past. Interpreting the many different meanings and functions of homes is central to writing stories of the residential landscapes of a neighborhood.

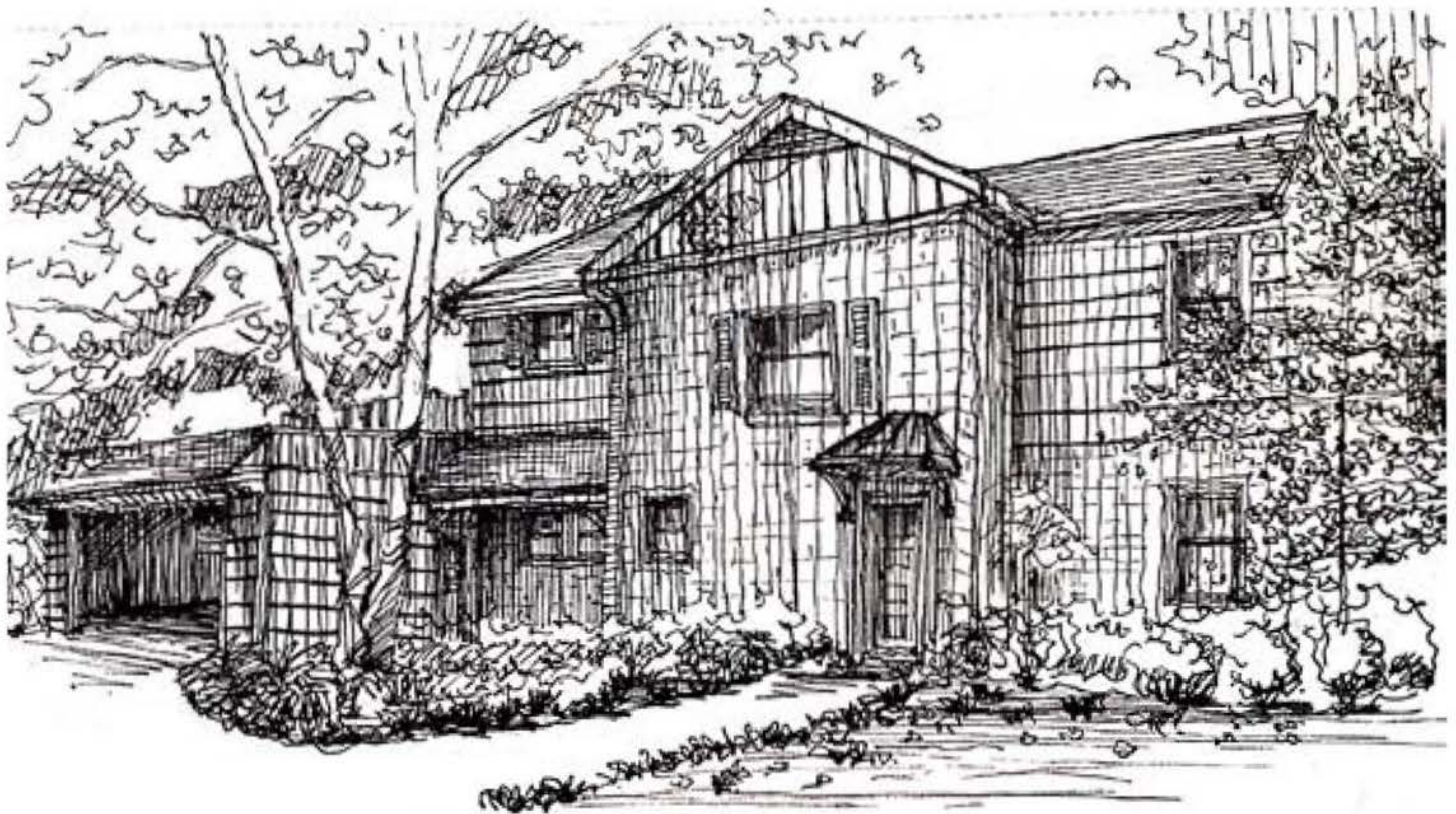
We found that homes in this neighborhood serve the function of generating contact, providing prospect, nurturing labor, and displaying craft. Each of the homes highlighted in this section can be interpreted in multiple and overlapping ways. Thus homes listed under the section titled “labor,” may also be interpreted using the category of “craft.” Our intention is not to pigeonhole particular buildings as representative of a single identity but to engage residents and viewers to begin to read their homes using all four thematic categories suggested above.





# NEIGHBORS:

## Charles Foote and Laurel Maney's House



Laurel Maney's house.

Mingjing. 2013. 6.27

House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013



Laurel Maney and her husband Charles Foote have lived in this home for the past 17 years. Their house was built in 1954. Maney considers this neighborhood near Back Bay Park, her home. She teaches Chemistry and Pharmacology at MATC (Milwaukee Area Technical College). Her husband,, a retired advertising executive, is originally from Chicago.

Maney loves old houses. She was raised near Boston and loved the historic quality of that city. Her current residence is, in her own words, “an undistinguished home” compared to the variety of gracious old homes surrounding it. The ranch style design is just what they need for their lifestyle. The most beloved feature of this house is a large, magnificent garden in the back of the house, hidden from the street and occupying pretty much the entire middle of the block.

Gardening is Maney’s way to connect to her family traditions. Culture comes in the form of a tradition of gardening that her family passed down from grandmother and mother. She feels a connection to both of these women when she works in the yard.



Interior view of dining room.



Outside dining area and garden.



The garden area has sculptures and chairs.



Dining room detail.



# NEIGHBORS:

## Joe Libnoch's House



Joe Libnoch's House.



House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013



Architect: Armin C. Frank  
(Peacock & Frank)

Built in 1922, this house was described by Richard Perrin as “characteristic of Armin Frank’s best combination of French Provincial and English Medieval architecture carried out in stucco and brick with half-timber accents.” According to this author the “plan of the house is exceptionally well articulated and scale and proportion are excellent.” In 1971 the interior layout was converted in order to accommodate a two-family residence.

Joe Libnoch moved into his new home in 1994. A love for architecture explains his fascination with his home and its history. Now retired, Libnoch likes to give his time to neighborhood organizations such as the Friends of Villa Terrace and the North Point Light House Friends.

Perrin, Richard W. E., *Milwaukee Landmarks*, Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1979. Plans measured and drawn by BLC field school students.



Entrance to garden room.



Dining area.



Looking into the dining room



# NEIGHBORS:

## Andy Nunemaker's House



House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013



This house was originally built for Guido Vogel in 1905. Andy Nunemaker, the current owner, did extensive renovations and modifications to the building. When Nunemaker bought this house he found that a formal dining room had been added at the back of the house. This room became the perfect place for a billiard table. He relocated the dining room towards the front of the house in a smaller, more intimate room, better suited for the dinner parties that he hosts. Subsequently, every room in the home was redone except for the first floor bathroom.

Andy Nunemaker was born and raised in a modest neighborhood on the northwest side of Milwaukee. As a boy, his father used to bring him to the East Side. It was a part of the city they both loved. Andy memorized all the features of the area around the Water Tower. He left Milwaukee after finishing college at Marquette University and lived in Sydney, Australia. After his return he bought and renovated the Falk House just two doors up from his current home on Terrace Avenue.



Sitting room area.



Staircase area.



Living room area.



Interior view.



# SITE AND LOCATION:

## Christopher Bauer's House



House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013



This house was built in 1918 on a relatively small and rectangular plot overlooking Lake Michigan. The interior layout has been extensively remodeled and transformed over the years. Each floor was subdivided into apartments at various times in the past. Currently there are two apartment units. There is a single apartment unit in the first floor while the second and third floors house a second unit.

The front of the house has a long rectangular living area. Separated by a pocket door, the front and back sections of this living space have distinct architectural ornamentation. The hierarchy of ornamentation helps us interpret the relative use and importance of these interconnected spaces. Architectural molding, woodwork, and decoration in the front room are simple while the back room details are more elaborate. The front room has the view of the lake while the back room is directly connected to the kitchen.

Christopher Bauer was born in Milwaukee. His father was born in Germany and came to US when he was two years old. His mother is German too but she was born in the U.S. The oldest of five children, Bauer attended UW-Madison and worked for Wisconsin National Bank in 1970. After getting his MBA degree at Marquette University he worked for US Bank until January 1999. He loves living across the street from Lake Park with a direct view of Lake Michigan.



Transition space between front room and back room, and dining room.



Back room.



Front room looking towards the lake.



# MATERIALS:

Kristin Bergstrom and  
Lloyd Dickinson's House



House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013



Lloyd Dickinson grew up in Green Bay, WI. He graduated from the law school in Madison. Dickinson retired earlier this year from the Foley & Lardner, LLP law firm. He is president of the Historic Water Tower Association, formerly Historic Water Tower Trust. When he got involved with this group there was a rumor that Columbia St. Mary's hospital was going to tear down the Water Tower. This wasn't actually the case but Lloyd still likes to mention it, with a twinkle in his eye, "it keeps things on the edge". The association has been concerned with the expansion of both the hospital and the university into their neighborhood. They have helped redirect that expansion to the west of Downer Avenue.

Their stone house at the corner of East Bellevue and North Wahl Avenues was built in 1920-23 for William Luick, the owner of the largest dairies in Wisconsin, the Luick Creamery. Phillips and Brust, one of the top architecture firms in Milwaukee at that time, built the house.

An interesting structural fact about the house is that the home is made almost entirely of bricks, stone and concrete. The reason for this was that Mrs. Luick remembered a horrible fire in downtown Milwaukee when she was a little girl in 1888. She insisted that her home be built with as little wood as possible. The building has an open plan but also has a dark, almost medieval interior ambience. There are decorative references to this theme throughout the house in gargoyle designs and stained glass windows set in smaller leaded panels. The exterior fence has a crenellated rusticated feel in the way the stones are set at right angles to the coursing of the wall. There is a small and beautifully appointed garden, and two patios. There is also a coach house above the garage that leads from a back stair to the former servants' quarters, now used as guest rooms.



Garden path.



Roof detail showing tiles.

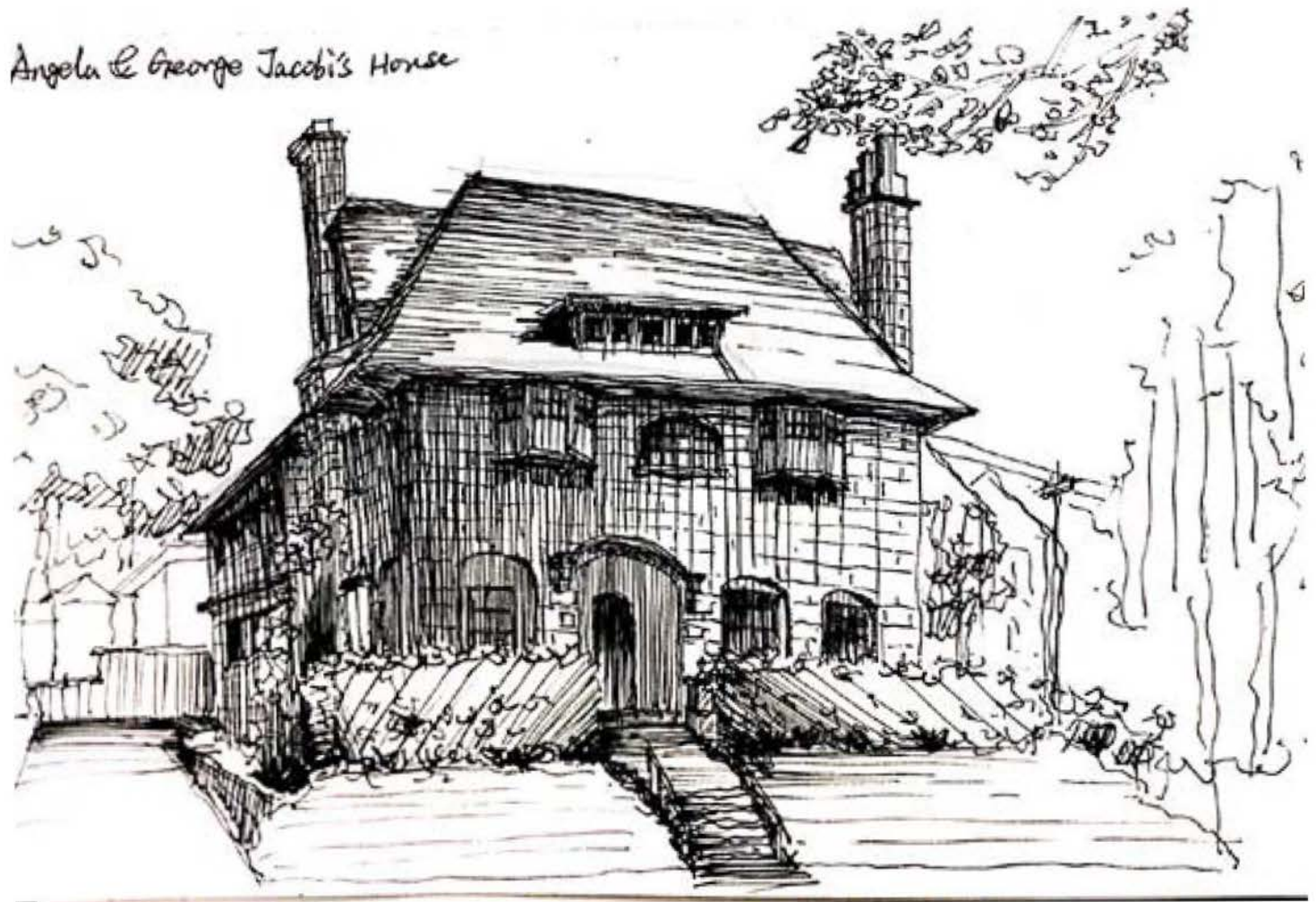


Roof detail showing eaves.



# MATERIALS:

## Angela and George Jacobi's House



House Sketch. Mingjing He, 2013

Edwin and Louise Lemp Pabst of the Pabst Brewery family owned this gracious home. Louise Lemp was a professional artist who had studied and lived in Paris for 20 years. She changed the layout of the house: she had two large picture windows installed in front of house, had marble floors put in the main first floor rooms, and she changed the heating to radiant, removing the unsightly radiators. She made the third floor into her art studio. After the death of the Lemps, the house remained vacant for three years. During this time it was used once as a symphony house.

George Jacobi was offered a job with Johnson Controls and the couple moved to Milwaukee from Chicago in 1978. He is now retired. They chose this house originally because it was close to the freeway. Angela Jacobi was unfamiliar with Milwaukee and wanted to be close to Chicago, because she thought she'd miss her friends too much.



Exterior view.



View of bay windows.



# SERVICE SPACES

Domestic landscapes signify and codify human relationships. These pages show how service spaces were carefully placed in relation to the main house in order to ensure the invisibility of the servants and secure the owners' genteel lifestyle. In this study, we examine the social relations between owners and servants by analyzing the layout, use and spatial rhythms of the service spaces in three different sized houses in the Historic Water Tower neighborhood.





# SERVICE SPACES:

## The Villa Terrace



Callbox, 2013

The Villa Terrace had the largest service wing among all the three houses examined in this study. This building was constructed in 1924 for the Lloyd R. Smith family. The building was representative of a larger and wealthier household. The main house was separated from the service spaces. The latter was located in a separate wing. Unlike other homes studied in this field school the servant's quarters at the Villa Terrace were designed in a more elaborate manner. The building has two floors in addition to a basement. Service space in the basement included a man's room, boiler room, cold air room, coal room, kitchen storage room, laundry room and a passage room. Service space on the first floor included a butler's pantry, kitchen, cook's pantry, servant's hall and a servant's bedroom. The second floor had three servants' bedrooms with a call box nearby, a linen sewing room and a dressing room.

There were four female servants in this house in 1930. According to the census records, 40 year old Jean McCurdy from Scotland spoke Scottish and 29 year old Hanna A. Lugser from Germany spoke German. Millie Hankey, the 45 year old cook from Wisconsin and Georgia B. Harding, a 34 year old nurse from Wisconsin also lived in these quarters. There were four female servants in this house in 1940. Forty-three year old Betty McMahon was a nursemaid who came from Scotland. Betty Eichmann was a 45 year old general maid who came from Wisconsin. Forty year old cook, Zovi Toni, was born in Austria. Lola Kiepe served as the second maid. She came from California and was 27 years old.



Printscreen from Smith Family 1927-1937 Home Video

Herman, Bernard L. *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

*Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum & Renaissance Garden Visitor Guide booklet*, Milwaukee: Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, n.d.

United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth, Sixteen Census of the United States, 1930*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930, 1940.

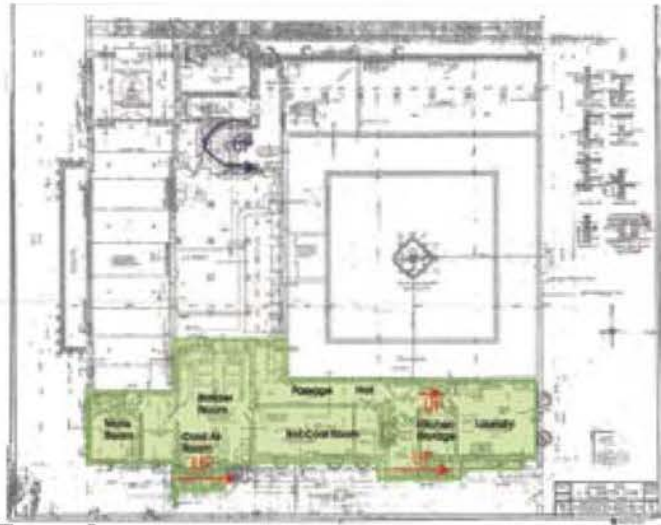
*Smith Family 1927-1937 Home Video*. DVD. Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum.

*The Villa Terrace Floor Plans*. Milwaukee: Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, 1923.



The servants' spaces at the Villa Terrace were laid out hierarchically. The servants' main working area in the basement was poorly furnished compared to the main house and the butler's pantry. All the floors and the ceilings in the basement were made of concrete. Windows did not provide much light. The walls were covered in glazed tile. The hierarchy between servant rooms is evident from the architectural and spatial details. The butler's pantry was closest to the kitchen and dining areas and this room commanded considerable importance. The pantry had a glazed tile floor. There was a double-sink with full counter and cabinets in the butler's pantry. On both sides of the counter, there were two upper cabinets. In addition to this room, there was a servant's bedroom located on the first floor. The decorations in this servant's bedroom indicate that this room might have belonged to a head servant. The room had big windows that offered a good view to the yard. It was decorated with hardwood floors and had a closet. There was a bathroom connected to this room.

The first floor lodging space was separated from other servants' rooms in the second floor of the service wing. Servant's room #1 had two closets; so two individuals might have shared this room. The windows faced the neighboring house and did not have a good view. Servant's room #2 had two closets. Servant's room #3 had good light and faced the street. It was closer to the bathroom. Compared to the other rooms, this bathroom was more decorated. Painted walls, brass windows, glazed tiles surrounded the bath, although the design of the door was relatively plain. Judging by its location and orientation we may infer that a servant of a higher status might have occupied this room.



Villa Terrace Basement.



Villa Terrace first floor



Villa Terrace second floor



# SERVICE SPACES:

## 2225 N. Lake Drive



Stair Hall on the First Floor, 2013



Staircase, 2013

This 7150 square foot house was built in 1927. This building is not as large as the nearby Villa Terrace whose service space stretched across an entire wing of the house. However, the service space in this building did span across the southeast portion of the first floor and the northwest portion of the second floor. Like the Villa Terrace, the placement of the servants' spaces in this house emphasized a hierarchical organization of servants within the household.

According to census records, in 1930 there were two female servants in this house. Forty-five year old Julia Klein from Yugoslavia spoke both English and Slovak while 19 year old Ruth L. May from Wisconsin spoke English. The design of this house ensured that these servants remained unseen for most of the time. For instance, the right side of the stair hall on the first floor had a door connecting the service wing to the front parlor. That door is now sealed, but we can imagine how the servants must have slipped out of this door in order to gather the coats from guests during formal social events. We can imagine how they would hang the coats and slip unnoticed back into the service wing through this doorway. In another instance we may find how the careful placement of doors between the dining room pantry and the kitchen cuts off the view of the kitchen from the guests seated in the formal dining room.

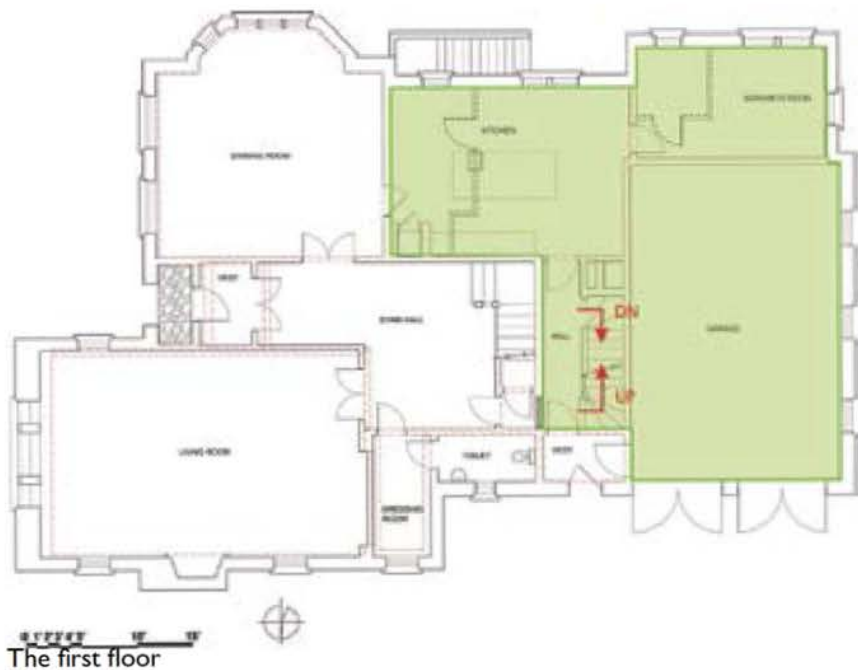
United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930.

House was measured and Floor Plans were drawn by BLC Field School Residential Group: Mingjing He and Junshi Zhao, 2013.

Upton, Dell. "Seen, Unseen and Scene." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, 174-79. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.

The homeowner and the servants used different staircases to get to their respective residential spaces. If we compare the architectural ornamentation of the service wing to that in the main household spaces we find that the servants' staircase sported railings with ordinary newel posts while the stairs in the main house were elaborately detailed. The back staircase, despite its minimal ornamentation commanded our attention as much as the beautifully decorated front stairs. Servants used the former in order to access the basement and kitchen from the service wing. A locus of activities, hustle and bustle, this back stairway must have been a heavily used space. The temporal rhythms, or tempo, of this space were determined by the speed of movement, urgency of behavior, and intensity of activities as servants went up and down to conduct their daily chores. Compare this to the relaxed tempo of activities in the front stairs on a leisurely evening of socializing and partying. By comparing the tempo of the two stairs at any time during the day we may interpret the complex workings of social life in residential mansions and the labor and care necessary to sustain a certain quality of life and lifestyle in these buildings.

This house has two floors. The service wing used to be located at the southwest end of the house. The service wing included a pantry, kitchen, storage room, servant's room and garage. On the second floor, the service space included a pantry, kitchen, closet and two maids' rooms.





# SERVICE SPACES: 2118 Kenilworth Place



Milkbox, 2013



Servant's room, 2013



Servant's Staircase, 2013



Passageway, 2013

Shirley du Fresne McArthur. *North Point historic districts-Milwaukee*. Milwaukee: North Point Historical Society, 1981.

Kristie and Amine Bennazza, interview by Megan Shuemate, Hongyan Yang and Junshi Zhao, 2118 Kenilworth Place, June 21, 2013.

Adams, Christopher L. *2118 E Kenilworth Pl Floor Plans*. Milwaukee: Department of City Development, 1996.

Upton, Dell. "Seen, Unseen and Scene." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, 174-79. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.

The house at 2118 Kenilworth Place was designed by Fred Graf and built by Conrad Brothers Investment Properties in 1899. Along with this property the developers also constructed three identical buildings on neighboring lots (2102, 2108, 2112 Kenilworth Place). These buildings were built as single-family homes but some were converted into duplexes by the early 1940s. Compared to Villa Terrace and Ferneding House, 2118 Kenilworth Place is considerably smaller in size at 3455 square feet. By analyzing this house, we can examine how smaller buildings in this neighborhood also accommodated living spaces for servants.



The first floor

This house has three floors. The basement was used for storage. The service space on the first floor included a kitchen. An original milk delivery box is still visible at the right side of the kitchen. This delivery box can be accessed from the service alley. Servants also went downstairs to the basement in order to store food and household items by using a staircase next to the kitchen. Instead of entering the house from the front door, servants entered the house through the unobtrusive back door.

As originally designed, the second floor had bedrooms or baths for the household. The third floor housed a servant. A smaller bedroom with a sink served as this servant's bedroom. There are two windows on the right side of this room. These windows looked down into the service alley, so that the servants could observe this service passageway from their window.

This house is representative of smaller households in which the main house was strategically separated from service spaces. By pushing the service spaces to the attic and basement, this house successfully separated the service spaces from the main house. Despite efforts to separate, the world of the servants and that of the owners remained interconnected in these smaller buildings.



The second floor



The third floor



The former home of Lloyd and Agnes Smith, the Villa Terrace has established itself as a landmark not only for the Historic Water Tower Neighborhood, but also for the city of Milwaukee. As one of the survivors of the many homes that were torn down along the lake bluff in the early 20th Century, this Italian Villa is instantly recognizable from its iconic garden and spectacular lake front view.





# THE VILLA TERRACE



Our reading of the Villa is framed through the lens of identity—of the original inhabitants, the past and current staff, community residents, as well as the everyday passersby. In engaging with the Villa, these individuals undergo an experience that reconfirms (or contradicts) how they identify with the landscape, the neighborhood, and themselves. The view and experience of the Villa becomes part of an embodied process by which an individual develops a sense of belonging to the larger culture and community.

The Villa exists as an important landmark on both a personal and an institutional level. The unique architecture, innovative garden, and peaceful ambience produce a sensorial experience creating an identity that is unique to the individual. In this way the Villa becomes a part of us.



Villa Terrace 2013





# SOPRA MARE





# Welcoming

As you enter the Villa you find yourself sheltered from the elements, under a peristyle around a courtyard. The courtyard completely envelops its guests producing a holistic sensorial engagement with that space. Water in the central fountain welcomes arriving guests. Chirping birds perched on the clay tiled roof allow ambient sounds to fill the space. The soothing sound of flowing water creates a state of calmness—a safe place from the outer surroundings. This soundscape creates a setting that detaches arriving guests from the outside world.

The fountain not only participates in a choreographed orchestra of ambient sound, it also guides guests along a processional path. The fountain restrains the central axis through the middle of the courtyard and sets stage for an ambling procession through the grounds. This slowing of movement engages other senses, such as those of sight, smell, touch, and sound.

Water is used early on in the processional movement as a way to calm the mood of arriving guests. It is here that water plays a symbolic role of giving life to the experience of the Villa.





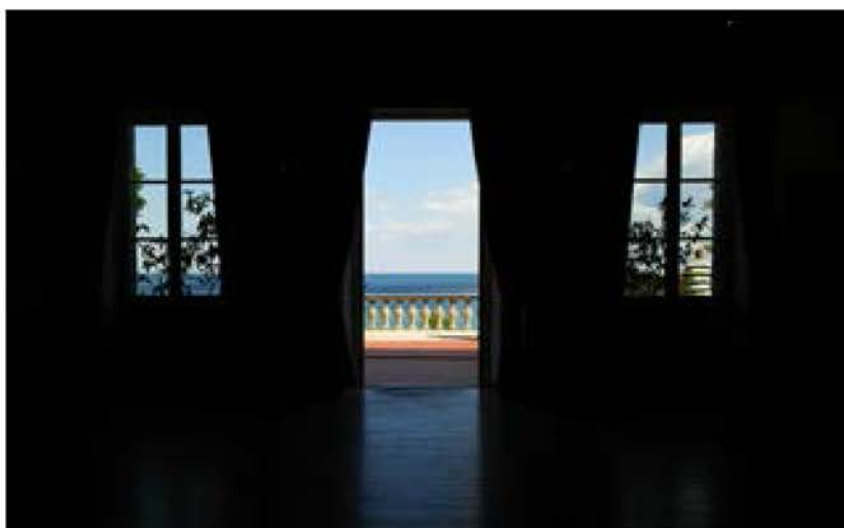
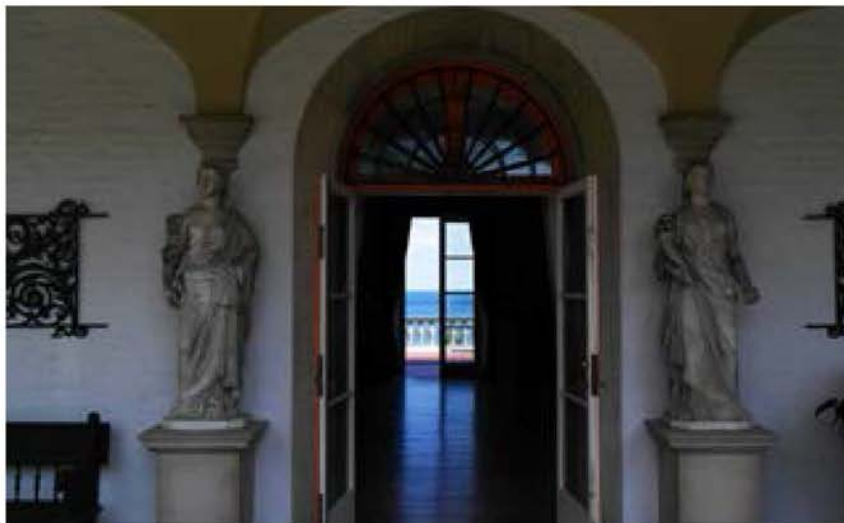
# SOPRA MARE



# Unity

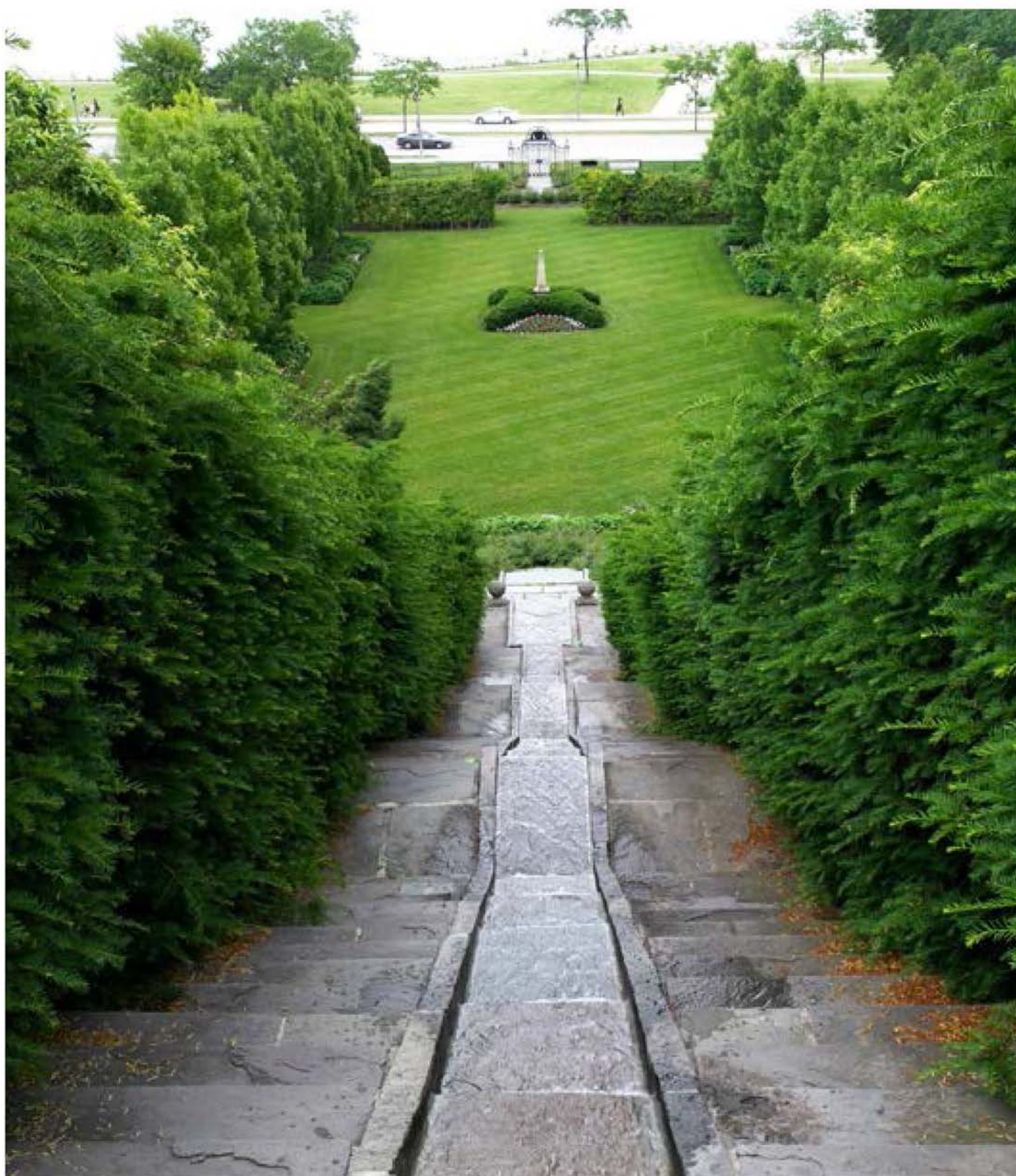
While crossing over from the courtyard into the home's great hall, a small reveal of Lake Michigan can be seen if one looks through the glazed doors. These linked views connecting the courtyard, the Great Hall, the rear terrace, and the garden become part of a unified piece. In addition, the permeable nature of the architecture suggests its strong connection to the outside world. Once inside the great hall, all outward views reiterate a harmonic copresence of architecture with manicured nature. Nature is never outside the home as an intruder. It is always revealed as a tamed companion existing alongside the Villa. As the architecture of the Villa crosses over the great hall into the rear terrace and the garden, it feels as if the Villa is reaching out towards nature, in order to embrace it as its loved companion.

The building façade overlooking the rear terrace was designed as the grandest space the Villa has to offer. Ornate Corinthian columns hold the architecture in praise atop a beautifully crafted terrace with stone balustrades and artfully designed putti. The scene seems set for visitors to admire the beautifully manicured Renaissance Garden below. In the past, before the beach and the Lincoln Memorial Drive were constructed, the Villa sat on the bluff and the property ended on the water's edge. The predominant face of the Villa was turned towards the lake.





# SOPRA MARE

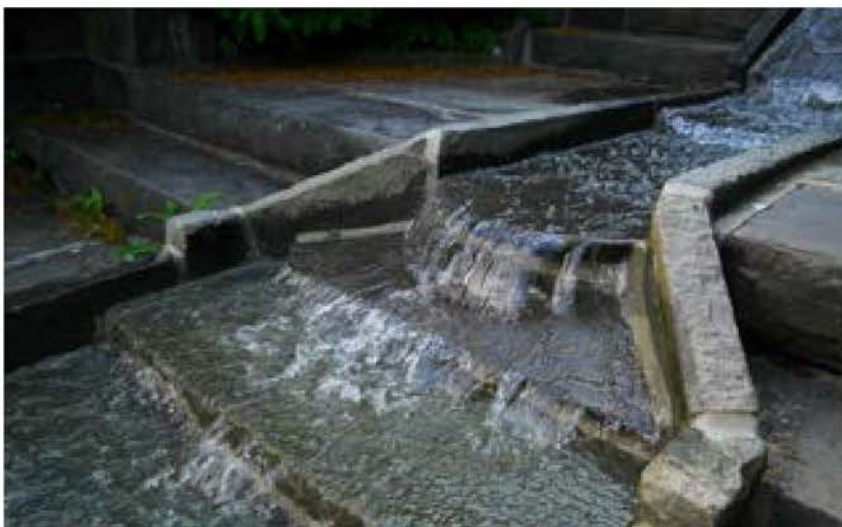
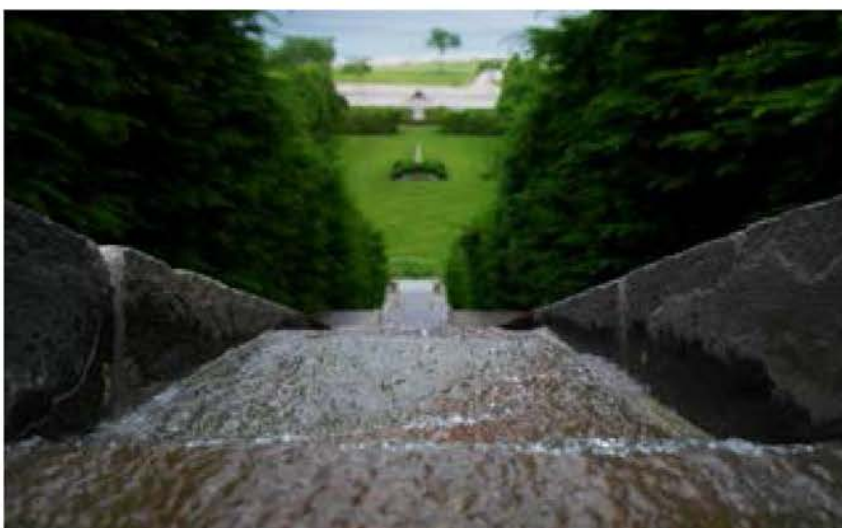




# Offering

Why would the Villa show its grandest side to Lake Michigan? It does so because the lake portrays the beauty of nature at its fiercest, purest, and to the human eye, at its most alluring state. The Villa was built to complement nature but not formed naturally as nature does. Despite its glory the Villa can only succumb to the beauty of Lake Michigan; even the final water-feature along the processional path through the Villa pays homage to the lake.

As you reach the edge of the rear terrace you see the lake as it merges with the sky. You hear the sounds of flowing water and you gaze into the beautiful horizon. But the sounds of water do not come from the lake in the distance—they culminate from a stepped water fountain. This water feature is an offer to the lake—for the Villa cannot match the latter's beauty and submits itself to the lake as an offering to the charm of nature. For without the lake, the Villa Terrace would not be the same and without the procession the Villa provides, the experience of nature would not be the same.





# AEGIS OF MEMORY



## Personal

In 1997, the Friends of Villa Terrace banded together to start the Italian Renaissance Garden for the Villa and to raise the \$1,750,000 necessary for such a project. The Friends Board, as described by members Delphine Cannon and Beth Chapman, consisted of docents, volunteers, neighbors, and other admirers who gladly took over the management, organization, and stewardship of the Villa from the Smith family. Individual relationships with the building grew as they recreated the lived and palpable experience of living an everyday life at the Villa: enjoying a serene lunch on the terrace overlooking Lake Michigan, watching young grandchildren ride bicycles around the Hermes statue, and hearing the reverberations of happily entertained guests in the great hall.

These visceral and intimate experiences invoke an understanding of experiential memory as defined by Richard Wollheim. Simply by thinking about the Villa, the stewards (in this case, the members of the Friends Board) distinctly imagined the days of the Villa's prime: the summer breeze, the fine banquets, and the strolls. In this way, the Villa was more than just a museum—it served as an icon, a symbolic “home,” and a way of life remembered by the stewards of the Villa and the neighborhood. The physical structure of the Villa served as a conduit through which memories of this era were accessed.





# AEGIS OF MEMORY





# Collective

The new management of Villa are once removed from the nostalgic memory of the Smith family and their lifestyle. These individuals who are actively working to sustain the Villa do not remember the Smith family or the social era of opulence and parties. Having no direct personal connection to the Smith family home (unlike those on the Friends Board), the current management approaches the Villa with new eyes, and they see a different story of preservation. This newer generation views and appreciates the Villa as a complete piece of art—the architecture and landscaped garden are impressive to behold, and a constructed sense of calm attracts the attention of newcomers to the museum today. The new management knows the Villa as a public museum, one with unique attributes and character that are worthy of protection and patronage.

Instead of preserving and presenting the Villa as a symbolic “home,” the current management targets the sensorial qualities of the site. By emphasizing the physical structures as well as the sensorial experience of “inhaling” the Villa (John Sterr, interviewed 06/21/13), the Villa Terrace becomes a desirable venue for educational programs and social events alike, such as the Art in the Garden Program, a successful initiative paired with Milwaukee public school art teachers, and the numerous annual weddings.





# AEGIS OF MEMORY





# Synthesis

The two experiences of memory displayed at the Villa are representative of how different groups of people remember: the first generation, who remembers the Villa as an intimate and palpable experience of a nostalgic domestic life, and the second generation, whose experience of the Villa is one of aesthetic and sensorial beauty. For the latter, the Villa is experienced through a collective, not personal, understanding of the social sphere of the Smith family.

As the first generation stewards give way to second generation managers, their skills complement each other to ensure a holistic representation of the house. It would be unfaithful to present the house as a building disassociated from the Smith family legacy, and it would be equally unfruitful to isolate this memory without regard to how people relate to the building today. As a first-time visitor to the Villa Terrace one month ago, I felt the synthesis of these two ways of remembering the past. The aegis of memory—the personal and the collective—thus insures that people will continue to relate to the Villa Terrace today, making the site a distinctive resource and asset to the Historic Water Tower neighborhood.





# SPEAKING IN DETAIL



## Refuge

The Villa Terrace tells us a story of class and privilege experienced by residents and guests. While an explanation of the boundary conditions, such as the drive-in gate and the terrace steps, is important, it does not tell us much of the story. We can learn more from the details of those conditions such as the level of ornamentation, the materials used, and when they were made. For instance the front fence of the property is made of pillars and ironwork. The vertical elements of the fence have no intricate details—they are made of solid iron rods. The entire fence lacks any ornamentation, apart from rivets and bolts, leaving its most predominant feature as the spikes on its top. Iron is a cold and hard material, which without ornamentation emanates a feeling of aloofness. This tells us that the fence was there to deter intruders.

While this may not seem like an amazing detail, it tells us about the family who lived there—their decision to erect a simple iron fence prohibited strangers from intruding but gave guests a sense of security. The fence, paired with other elements, such as the ironwork window grates, establish the withdrawn nature displayed by the Smith Residence towards Terrace Drive.





## SPEAKING IN DETAIL

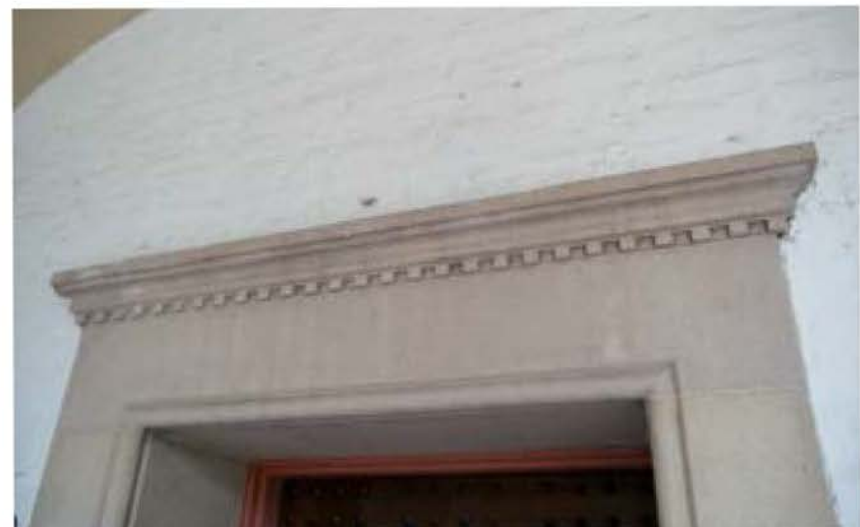




## Threshold

As we think about the people who lived in the Villa we begin to understand the importance attributed to the spaces they inhabited. We explored craftsmanship and detailing in order to interpret the social and spatial hierarchies within the Smith household. In the Villa Terrace we observe a wide range of craftsmanship. The doorways vary, from basic dimensional lumber molding to crafted stonework. Careful examination of the craft put into the door moldings and hardware tells us who occupied these space and informs us of their role and position within the household. The door handles are important pointers too. They tell us of a space's importance by responding to our touch. The use of each door handle expresses a privilege to enter, from polished brass to fixed wood, the feel of the handle hardware is a highly intimate welcoming sensation. The passageway from and to any space speaks to us in the same manner. Examination of our responses to these conditions tell us their social history.

The most elaborate spaces are enclosed by highly decorated moldings and hardware. These were spaces that were experienced by guests in the great hall. Spaces that have doorways with moldings and hardware that are basic are purely functional. Many were in spaces occupied by people of lesser social status. In the case of the Smith family that meant the servants.





## SPEAKING IN DETAIL





# Prospect

The details of decoration are a powerful part of our sensory environment. Whether it is an indoor crown molding or an outdoor cornice, details establish the presence of place. Our appreciation for craftsmanship and details influence the memory of spaces we occupy, weaving impressions of art, history, and culture—all of which have a direct relationship with the physical environment we are in. The benefit to us is that we can learn about another culture by identifying the decorative details of spaces.

The procession through the Villa begins at the courtyard. Here the columns are of a lower order within the classical system—in this case, the Doric order. This generates a level of importance to the space. In the second floor across the courtyard, the columns move up to a higher order—the Ionic order, suggesting that the upper level occupies a privileged position. It is not until you move through the house that you find the most privileged space. The rear terrace has columns of the highest order—the Corinthian order. What this tells us is that the further you proceed into this property you encounter increasingly elaborate detailing of columns and more rewarding spaces. During the time the Smith family lived there the most privileged people were allowed through the courtyard, past the house, and onto the rear terrace.





# ARTHUR SMITH



Few can say that they once lived in the Villa Terrace; and even fewer can say that they grew up there. Arthur Smith is fortunate enough to have that experience. Son of Lloyd and Agnes Smith, Arthur Smith is a keeper of some of the most intimate memories at the Villa Terrace. He remembers the Historic Water Tower neighborhood as a place full of friendly people, with many fond memories of the neighbors coming over for dinner and activities. Though the children were often not a part of the adult activities, there were always plenty of places for the kids to entertain themselves.

Smith recalls his father as a man who loved children and who never hesitated to make life more fun. He was always building contraptions for the children's enjoyment. Smith remembers that his father built motorized carts, a gun range in the basement, and an ice rink on their back porch. These are only a few of the many things Smith remembers from his early years with his father.

When it came to the family business, Smith's father would sit the family down and discuss what was going on. He would ask the children their opinion about various scenarios that came up at work. He was truly an inspirational man.

## Parts of a Story

While researching the Villa Terrace, it was our privilege to interview Arthur Smith at his home. Not only does his contribution to our project shed light on childhood experiences and pleasures at a place like the Villa Terrace, but it also reveals the nature of the Villa's domestic life.

Our reading of the Villa Terrace is heavily influenced by the way the building frames the identity of its users. Each visitor identifies with the Villa uniquely, based on past experiences, expectations, social position, and the sensorial experience at the Villa itself. Smith is one of the few who claims an experience of "home" upon revisiting the Villa.

As we gathered images, measurements, history, and ethnographic and personal narratives, our own understanding of the place began to come together. By its nature, this kind of research is set apart from quantitative data and analysis, and as such, we began to craft our understanding of the Villa from the point of view of all those with whom we collaborated: the caretakers, managers, volunteers, and patrons. It was through the information and stories we collected, whether historical or biological, that we developed our own story.

Through this process, we (as researchers and subjects) became inextricably linked to a world created by the Villa Terrace and those who care for it—a world within which we lived, breathed, and existed for five weeks. We are therefore no longer observers of the beautifully situated home atop the bluff. We are now participants in the Villa's story.





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# THANK YOU,

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