

Footsteps of La Crosse

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME & ARCHITECTURE



NORTH LA CROSSE TOUR OVERVIEW

North La Crosse has a history that is in some significant ways different from that of downtown La Crosse. For both areas, geography has played a large role in the historical development of the commercial and residential districts. North La Crosse is separated from the southern part of the city by the La Crosse River and extensive wetlands area known as the La Crosse River Marsh. During the Lumber Era, logs coming downstream on the Black River were directed to the large sawmills along the east bank of the Black River in North La Crosse. From its earliest days, the base industry in North La Crosse was lumber milling. Also, steamboats had a difficult time advancing upriver on the Black River, so North La Crosse did not develop as a shipping/commercial center. The immigrant group most associated with work in the pineries and lumber mills were the Norwegians, who became the dominant ethnic group in North La Crosse and established early on a lumber camp, working class flavor to the community.

With the coming of the railroad in the late 1850s, North La Crosse became the site of much of the activity of the rail industry, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th century. The four major rail lines all had important operations in North La Crosse and employment in the rail industry was a major occupation for many on the north side. These railroad jobs and later employment opportunities in industry and manufacturing on the north side perpetuated a “blue collar” tradition in the commercial and residential areas. The socio-economic division between north and south La Crosse is still evident today. That difference is reflected in the architecture of North La Crosse.

Of the thirty buildings on the Walking Tour of North La Crosse the great majority are public, commercial or industrial buildings reflecting the unique history of the north side and a strong sense of community pride. The industrial buildings are associated with the railroads and with other early 20th century industries that developed after the Lumber Era. Several of the featured churches were founded by ethnic groups specifically associated with North La Crosse. The core commercial district along Caledonia Street has very few high-style buildings and many of the vernacular 19th and 20th century facades have been greatly altered. However, “Old Towne North” still retains a distinctive commercial flavor attractive to heritage tourists. There are a few examples of well preserved Victorian Era residences in North La Crosse but the majority of residences are vernacular interpretations of popular historic styles. There are two buildings in North La Crosse on the National Register of Historic Places and several La Crosse City Historic Landmarks, although several more buildings are eligible for both lists.

The architectural landmarks of North La Crosse are not highly concentrated in one area so you may want to use your car or bicycle as you explore the “Footsteps of North La Crosse.” Enjoy your tour!

Site 1: A. C. Carter House – A. C. Carter House Bed & Breakfast
1803 Charles St.
Built in 1890

The two-story wood frame Carter House is a rather well preserved example of a modest interpretation of the popular Victorian era Queen Anne style. The irregular mass with multiple gables, decorative scalloped shingle siding, and open first and second story porches are all typical of the Queen Anne style. An intact, fine decorative element of the Carter House is the second story bracketed and multi-colored oriel window facing Charles Street.

Amos C. Carter was a Civil War veteran who came to La Crosse in 1876 after living for eleven years in Sparta. He was an independent builder and contractor who later with his son operated a grocery and dry goods business in the 1300 Block of Caledonia Street. A.C. Carter built the home that retains his name, and his daughter, Bessie Carter Riley lived in there until her death in 1985. In 1986 the Wisconsin Historical Society determined that the A.C. Carter House to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Site 2: Amtrak Passenger Depot & Retail-Milwaukee Road Passenger Depot
601 St. Andrew St.
Built in 1927

The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway (later the Milwaukee Road) Depot was built in North La Crosse in spite of an attempt to build a "Union Depot" in downtown La Crosse after the 1878 Milwaukee Road Depot was destroyed by fire in 1913. The railroads played a pivotal role in the development of La Crosse in the early 20th century and the establishment of several rail depots in the city made the city an important destination and shipping point. Through the 1930s and 1940s more than 75% of travel was made by rail. After WWII and the establishment of the inter-state highway system, railway traffic declined precipitously. Amtrak took over passenger rail service in 1971 and continues to operate the La Crosse Amtrak Depot today.

At the time it was built, the railroad depot on St. Andrew Street was a state of the art facility with three distinct sections: the passenger depot station, enclosed breezeway and baggage/freight station. The two-story rectangular brick depot has a Spanish Revival tiled hip roof and eclectic architectural elements of the Colonial Revival and Prairie School styles. The overhanging eaves, horizontal band of Chicago style windows, rectangular highlights with tile insets and curved bracket-like downspouts show the Early Modern/Prairie School influence popular in the first decades of the 20th century. The depot is one of the last remaining and best preserved examples of railroad related architecture in the city. The Milwaukee Road Depot was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark.

Site 3: The Photographer – Bethel Lutheran Church
1452 George St.
Built in 1889

The former Bethel Lutheran Church building is the oldest and one of the few surviving Gothic Revival churches in La Crosse. The front-gabled red brick building has the pointed arch windows and door openings that are typical of this style. The rectangular central entrance and bell tower has a pyramidal roof with eave brackets. Dentil detailing is evident under the tower pent roof and along the cornice under the steep gable roof. Although the bell tower has been modified, the exterior is mostly intact and well maintained. The brick façade had been painted; the paint was removed in recent years by the current owner.

The Bethel Lutheran Church was organized by Norwegian immigrants in 1886, the fifth Norwegian Lutheran Church in La Crosse. Bethel was affiliated with the same synod as St Paul's Lutheran Church on the south side of La Crosse. However, North La Crosse residents wished to have a church closer to their home and built a new church on George Street in 1889. In 1958, the Bethel congregation moved to a new church at 1931 Loomis Street, their current location. Later, the Bethel Lutheran Church building was used by the local Mormon community before being purchased by Jim Theile and Carol Lindberg in 1997. Their business, "The Photographer," was given a preservation award by the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse in 2006.

Site 4: Gifted Hands – Christenson Barbershop & Railroad Society Rooms
1200 Caledonia St.
Built in 1891/ca. 1895

Located at the south end of Old Towne North, this well preserved two-story brick Late Victorian Commercial Vernacular building has a nearly square mass that is emphasized by symmetrical window placement and repeated decorative elements. The first section located at the northeast corner of Caledonia and St Paul Streets was built in 1891. An addition of similar materials and architectural elements was built sometime later. Like many commercial structures of the day, this building provided retail/service space on the main floor and residential rental space above. The tall narrow windows of the second story have pedimented lintels with decorative incised rosettes. The pressed-metal bracketed cornice has dentil detailing highlighted with contrasting colors. The second story windows have been reduced from their original openings, the street level façade has been altered and transom windows covered up and the awnings are not original. All of these changes, however, are reversible.

Site 5: Burlington RR Clubhouse – Harry J. Olson Senior Center
1607 North St.
Built in 1887

The arrival of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad line in 1886 established North La Crosse as a major regional rail hub. The C. B. and Q. built a depot, shops and roundhouse on the east edge of the north side and added a club house/dormitory for railroad employees in 1887. Originally a two and a half story brick building with design and decorative elements typical of late 19th century commercial buildings, the Burlington Club House has twice had major alterations to accommodate two different uses. The railroad sold the building in the early 1930s, and it was used by the Evangelical Free Church for over 40 years. In 1951, the church removed the full second story and replaced it with a gable roofed half story and added a steeple over the main entrance. In the late 1970s a single story addition was built for the change of use to a community center for North La Crosse senior citizens.

Although greatly altered overall from its original design, the first story brick façade retains the Romanesque Revival style arched windows with cut limestone keystones and raised hood molding. The gable-roofed dormers and stained

glass windows remain from the period when the building served as a church. Once listed as a La Crosse City Historic Landmark, the bronze Landmark plaque is still attached to the south wall just to the right of the entrance.

Site 6: Office and apartment space – Burlington RR Depot and Office
1601 Rublee St.
Built 1929

The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad arrived in La Crosse in 1885 and became a major transportation link in the north-south corridor along the east bank of the Mississippi River from Illinois to St Paul. The C. B. and Q. established a huge rail yard in the Grand Crossing neighborhood in North La Crosse and built several rail related buildings. This depot building was one of the last to be built by the Burlington line and was designed to function as a combination passenger depot, express office and rail headquarters which replaced an earlier wood frame building on the site. The Burlington Depot continued to serve the rail line into the 1980s. A very popular north side restaurant, “The Q Lunch” was located in this building for many years. Currently the building has apartments and office space.

The rectangular two-story brick depot building has a number of decorative elements typical of the Neo-Classical style that was very popular for public and commercial buildings in the first half of the 20th century. Some of these elements include a cut limestone projecting cornice that creates the sense of classical entablature above, classically ornamented entry, limestone capped pilasters that divide the façade into symmetrical bays and evenly spaced sets of windows with plain sills and lintels. The Burlington Railroad Office and Depot is another surviving reminder of the importance of the railroad industry in North La Crosse.

Site 7: Caledonia Street Antique Mall/A B C Hobbies – Riviera Theater
1213 Caledonia St.
Built in 1920

The Riviera Theatre is a smaller two-story North La Crosse counterpart to the four-story Rivoli Theatre (1920) in downtown La Crosse. The Riviera Theatre was built in the same year and also designed by architects Parkinson and Dockendorff in the same Chicago Commercial style with Neo-Classical decorative elements. The crème brick façade of the building is accented by a horizontal row of tall narrow double-hung windows divided by vertical brick piers topped with decorative tiles. The verticality of the façade is enhanced by a pair of brick pilasters that define the central bay and extend through a cut limestone projecting cornice to the top of the parapet wall. In the center of the parapet is a classically inspired decorative centerpiece flanked by circular tile medallions. On either side of the central bay are evenly spaced oblong decorative insets that match in shape and scale the decorative glazed tiles below. Archival photo shows that the two finials above the paired pilasters have been removed along with the marquee and original canopy.

Both theaters were built when “movie palaces” played an important role in the social environment of the community and are important visual reminders of the important role of the early 20th century commercial districts. Odin Oyen provided the interior decorative design for both theaters. In 1942, the Riviera Theatre was completely remodeled with a more “modern” look. In the 1960s the theater was closed and converted into a clothing store. In recent years the theater building has served as a retail outlet for a number of antique shops. The Riviera Theatre building remains one of the most architecturally significant buildings in North La Crosse.

Site 8: John J. Callahan House
933 Rose St.
Built in 1894

The towering, colorful Queen Anne style John L. Callahan House is one of the most architecturally significant and well preserved homes in North La Crosse and the only residence on the north side that is on the National Register of Historic Places. This “painted lady” has all of the stylistic elements associated with the Queen Anne style, including an imposing asymmetrical multi-gabled mass, multi-textured and colored exterior, three-story tower and large open wrap-around porch. The patterned decorative shingle siding is also typical of the Shingle Style, which is a contemporary variant of the Queen Anne style.

Physician Dr. John L. Callahan hired noted local architects Hugo Schick and Gustav Stoltze to design a grandiose new home that he lived in for less than ten years. Callahan’s partner, George Lueck, purchased the home in 1903 and also practiced medicine there through most of the 20th century. In 1950 the Callahan House was converted to a funeral home and was restored to a single-family residence in 1981 by Robert and Margaret Solberg. The Solbergs spent several years restoring the interior and exterior of their house to its late 19th grandiosity and had the property listed on the National Register in 1995. The Callahan House is also a La Crosse City Historic Landmark and was given a preservation award by the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse in 1990.

Site 9: Central States Warehouse – Moto Meter/Electric Auto Lite Building
700 Gillette St.
Built in 1914/1920 & 1928

The National Gauge and Equipment Company was an early and very successful local business associated with the automobile industry. Local entrepreneurs Philo Gelatt and Daniel McMillan purchased the Hans Motor Company in

1913, and changed the name to the National Gauge and Equipment Company and built a new factory on Gillett Street in 1914. As the name suggests, the business made gauges, heaters and instruments for the growing automobile industry. In 1926, Philo Gelatt bought out his partner, changed the business name to the Moto Meter Gauge and Equipment Company and by the late 1920s the company became the largest producer of automotive gauges in the US. In 1929, the company was acquired by Electric Auto Lite Company and by the early 1950s Electric Auto Lite was one of the largest employers in the city, accounting for 20% of all manufacturing jobs in La Crosse. Auto Lite closed its La Crosse operation in 1959. The building is currently used for commercial storage.

More significant for its association with the economic history of La Crosse, the design of the brick two-story former manufacturing plant is typical of early 20th century industrial architecture. The mostly unornamented Gillette Street façade is divided into eight bays by limestone capped brick pilasters. The entry bay has a Neo-Classical frontispiece topped with a name block and flanked by a pair of brick pilasters. Decorative insets in the entry bay have Art Deco influenced pyramidal motifs. A plain low-angle projecting pediment sits atop the cut limestone cornice. Window and door openings have been drastically altered and detract from the historic character of the façade. Additions were made in 1920 and 1928 and the 1928 addition was built by Frank Schwalbe and Son from a design by Otto Merman and Herman Skogstad.

Site 10: Erik Rynning House
1418 Charles St.
Built in 1894

This massive two-and-a-half story late 19th century residence is one of the most distinctive and architecturally significant homes in North La Crosse. The three-story tower with conical roof, asymmetrical multi-gabled mass, tall decorative brick chimney and open porches are all elements of this high-style brick interpretation of the Queen Anne style. Masonry exterior precludes the use of intricate scrollwork and contrasting surfaces typical of the Queen Anne style. However, the variety of window size, placement and lintels provides the exterior complexity of the Queen Anne style. The Rynning House is one of the early residential works of the Peter Nelson Company. Archival photo shows the exterior to be essentially unaltered.

Erik B. Rynning (1858-1895) was born and educated as a civil engineer in Norway, immigrated to America in 1887 and settled in La Crosse in 1878. He was initially hired as a bookkeeper for lumberman N.B. Holway in 1879. By 1891 Rynning ran a clothing store and later was a cashier for the Exchange State Bank on Rose Street. He married Norwegian immigrant Cathinka Steen in 1883. Although he died quite young, Erik Rynning was a North La Crosse success story. Reportedly, 1500 people attended his funeral at the Norwegian Lutheran Church at Charles and Sill Streets and the home that bears his name is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark. In 1983, the Erik Rynning House received an award from the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse for historic preservation.

Site 11: Fire Station #4
906 Gillette St.
Built in 1940

This fire station building is an important example of civic architecture in La Crosse. It is the oldest fire station still functioning and the only fire station exhibiting the influence of historic styles. The two-story brick building has a hip roofed mass with hip roofed dormers. The battered/stepped limestone detail around the fire truck entry suggests a Tudor Revival/Arts and Crafts influence. Neo-Classical elements include the dentiled cornice and tall multi-paned and six-over-six windows.

Fire Station #4 is historically and architecturally significant because it is one of the few buildings remaining in the city associated with the early 20th century history of the La Crosse Fire Department. The fire station building includes a large equipment room, private captain's bedroom, lounge and kitchen, locker rooms, second story dormitory and a hose room and drill tower. It was the first fire station in La Crosse that met modern standards for fire fighting. The building was designed by Racine based architect J. Mandor Matson and built by Peter Nelson and Son, contractor.

Site 12: Goddard Hotel Apartments – Goddard Hotel
15639 Prospect St.
Built in 1888/1891

The Goddard Hotel, also known as the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Hotel is directly associated with the railroad history of North La Crosse. It was built in 1888 by William Goddard who saw a business opportunity for a hotel to cater to the railroad workers and travelers in need of lodging in the Grand Crossing vicinity. Goddard hired architect William H. Parker to design his hotel in the rather simple brick Commercial Vernacular style of the late Victorian era. The business apparently prospered in the first two years, and in 1891 a fourteen room north/south addition was built on to the original sixteen room east/west oriented structure. By the mid 1920s, the hotel's original thirty rooms were converted into eight apartments and it remains an apartment building today.

Originally, the two-story brick hotel was ornamented with a hip roofed square tower with decorative finial, windows with segmental brick arched lintels, and a plain frieze running along the top of the façade under the eaves. The original open porch had minimally decorated turned wooden posts. In spite of some major alterations, including the removal of the decorative tower and the full-width front porch, the Goddard Hotel building still retains architectural

and historic significance as a good example of a railroad-era workingman's hotel and a surviving architectural representative of the railroad era in North La Crosse.

Site 13: Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul RR Crossing Tower – Grand Crossing Tower
1231 Rose St. (Copeland Park)
Built in 1928

The railroad era transformed the economic and social landscape of America in the latter half of the 19th century. La Crosse, which was already an important transportation center because of the steamboat traffic, increased in significance with the arrival of a rail line from Milwaukee in 1858. In the years to follow, the Chicago and Northwestern (1871), Green Bay and Western (1873) and Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (1885) all had rail lines and depots in La Crosse. The junction where these lines crossed (several hundred yards east of the east end of Gillette Street) became known as Grand Crossing. In 1887 the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul (Milwaukee Road) Railroad erected a two-story wood frame watchtower near the crossing point. The original watchtower was destroyed by fire in 1928. Built in 1928, the hip-roofed rectangular tower has horizontal wood siding, pairs of tall narrow windows and an observation deck on the upper level for better viewing. The watchtower was moved to Copeland Park in 1991 and today sits near a steam locomotive and caboose as reminders of the importance of the railroad industry in the history of North La Crosse. Both the watchtower and the steam locomotive/caboose are La Crosse City Historic Landmarks.

Site 14: Ernest Horner Building
1218 Caledonia St.
Built in 1894

This two-story brick commercial building is a well-preserved example of modest late 19th century commercial structures in North La Crosse. The Horner building has a highly decorative second story façade highlighted by a central Queen Anne style oriel window with Neo-Classical ornamentation. The bay window has an atypical extension into the cornice connected by a row of vertically placed rectangular windows. The pressed metal projecting cornice is decorated with dentiling above and festoons or garlands of fruit and flowers in the entablature below. The street level façade appears to have been altered.

The Horner Building was built by English-born entrepreneur Ernest Horner (b. 1851) in 1894. This building was a shoe store with a number of different owners for most of the 20th century; from 1910 until the early 1980s. In recent years the building was home to the "Purple Pig" antique shop.

Site 15: LaCrosse Footwear Complex – La Crosse Rubber Mills Complex
1407 St. Andrew St.
Built in 1913/1916, 1923, 1927, 1929

The La Crosse Rubber Mills was established in 1897 and initially produced ponchos and rainwear. In 1906 the company began producing footwear and became one of the largest manufacturing plants in the city. As the business grew, a new four-story building was erected on St. Andrew Street in 1913. Within 10 years the sale of rubber footwear became an international business and by 1925 the rubber mills employed nearly 1500 workers. Several large additions were built during the growth years of the 1920s to accommodate the expanding business. During the 1930s Depression business declined, wages were cut sharply and in 1934 one of the most important labor strikes in La Crosse history occurred at the plant involving over 1800 workers. After WWII the business climate improved, and by 1976 the La Crosse Rubber Mills was the second largest employer in the city. However, globalization of the manufacturing industry in the 1990s hit La Crosse Footwear quite hard and the plant closed in 2001. Recently, the LaCrosse Footwear Complex has been adapted to provide a location for a variety of commercial tenants including a micro-brewery.

The La Crosse Rubber Mills is one of the largest existing manufacturing buildings in La Crosse. This Early Modern U-shaped vernacular industrial building consists of a series of flat roofed sections, four-story brick curtain walls with large multi-paned casement window openings between the cut limestone piers. Since the large multi-paned windows are an important element of the architectural character of the building, the recent infill of several of the windows has created a controversy between the Historic Preservation Commission and the building owner. Still largely intact, the La Crosse Rubber Mills Company building is an important representation of the manufacturing and social history of La Crosse. In 2003, the complex was re-designated a La Crosse City Historic Landmark.

Site 16: Logan Middle School Auditorium
1450 Avon St.
Built in 1939

The first high school in La Crosse was built in 1878 and was located close to downtown at Fourth and Main Streets. In 1907, a large, new, modern two-story brick high school was built at Cass and Fifteenth Streets. It was called Central High School, but was hardly centrally located for residents of North La Crosse. In 1923 North La Crosse acquired a high school of its own. Logan High School (see archival photo) was built in 1923 and expanded in 1928. A large auditorium was built just to the south of the high school building in 1939. This is the only section of the old Logan High School on Avon Street that remains. The original Logan High School was razed in 1979 and replaced by the new

Logan High School in 1979 at 1500 Ranger Drive. The surviving auditorium section was incorporated into the new Logan Middle School.

The imposing smooth-cut Bedford limestone entry façade has three distinct bays defined by pointed arch Gothic Revival style door openings. The inscription of the name “Auditorium” above the doors is in a high-relief Gothic script. Ornamental bracket lamps flank the doors. The original window openings have been enclosed but otherwise the 1939 façade is mostly intact.

Logan High School was named for Civil War hero and US Senator John Alexander Logan (1826-1886) of Illinois who is credited with establishing Memorial Day in 1868 when he was Commander of the Union Army. It doesn't appear that he had any direct connection to La Crosse or Wisconsin specifically, or education in general.

Site 17: Maid-Rite – Otto Scheuermann Bakery & Confectionery
1119 Caledonia St.
Built ca. 1894

This plain front-gabled one story wood frame building is currently the location of the Maid Rite Restaurant, a unique quick-food franchise that has a distinctly mid-western heritage. The façade that projects above the roof-line is referred to as a “boomtown false front” and is often seen in small vernacular commercial buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Exterior alterations have compromised the architectural integrity of the building somewhat, but it remains one of a very few wood frame Boomtown Commercial buildings left in La Crosse.

Maid Rite sandwiches were developed by Fred Angell in 1926, a butcher from Muscatine, Iowa. This “unique loose meat sandwich” became very popular in Iowa in the 1920s and Maid Rite developed one of the first walk-up and drive-up fast food chains in the mid-west. Today there remain over 80 owner-operated Maid Rite restaurants, mainly in the central US. The current owner of the Maid Rite in La Crosse, Richard Beilke, has operated this restaurant since 1989.

Site 18: Immanuel Lutheran Church
1201 Avon St.
Built in 1907

The Immanuel Lutheran Church is a well-preserved example of an early 20th century interpretation of Gothic Revival architecture and the best surviving example of this style of church in La Crosse. Designed by noted local architects Hugo Schick and Andrew Roth, this church building has paired hexagonal steeples along with pointed arch windows and door openings that are the hallmark of the Gothic Revival style. The façade is further ornamented by pilasters and a corbelled cornice on the north and south sides; and a corbel table over a large Tudor arched window on the Avon Street side. The stepped buttresses on the tower corners and triple open arched entry are also elements typical of the Gothic Revival style. The monochromatic crème brick façade represents a simplification of the Gothic Revival often seen in early 20th century examples of this style.

German immigrants established Lutheran congregation on the south side of La Crosse in 1859. By the early 20th century the growing German Lutheran population needed a larger building and later the First Evangelical Lutheran Church (1904) was built at 400 West Avenue in the Romanesque Revival style. The German Lutheran community of North La Crosse wanted to have a church closer to home and the Immanuel Lutheran Church community was established on in 1888. Their first church was built in 1891 on the southeast corner of Avon and St Paul Streets, where the current Immanuel Lutheran School is located. Their second church is the current building at 1201 Avon Street.

Site 19: Muse Theatre – North Presbyterian Church
1353 Avon St.
Built in 1894

The red brick North Presbyterian Church building was built in 1894 and reflects a late Victorian blend of Gothic Revival and Romanesque Revival elements. This mixing of styles is often seen in church buildings of the late 19th century. The existing architectural elements include steep intersecting gable roofs with a rose window and row of Gothic Revival pointed arch windows on the Avon Street façade and large pointed arch window with tracery on the Logan Street façade. Articulated cut stone and red brick voussiors outline the pointed arch window and door openings. Archival photo shows a tall bell tower with round arched openings and rounded corner turrets, which are Romanesque Revival elements. The removal of the bell tower diminishes the architectural significance of the building.

The North Presbyterian Church was organized in 1867 and its first church services were in a school building that was located at 911 Rose Street. The church building at 1353 Avon Street was built in 1894 and in 1906 brick veneer was added. The North Presbyterian Church moved to a new building at 1327 North Salem Road in 1964. Currently the building on Avon Street no longer serves as a church but has recently been renovated and repurposed as a venue for local theater productions.

Site 20: Board Store – John O’Neil Building
522 Copeland Ave.

Built in 1877/1887

Architecturally significant because it is the best remaining example of a small commercial vernacular building of locally quarried limestone, the O'Neil Building was also known as the American House and for many years served as a restaurant, saloon and rooming house in the North La Crosse commercial district. Originally a two-story building owned by the John Hahn family, the building was sold to John O'Neil in 1885 and a third story with twelve additional rooms was added in 1887. After 1900, the O'Neil Building had many uses including a barber shop, hardware store and general store. For many years the barber shop was operated by Zechariah Moss, an African-American from an early La Crosse pioneer family. A railroad overpass built over the 500 block of Copeland Avenue in 1983 drastically reduced the commercial viability of this neighborhood.

Architectural elements of the O'Neil Building include a carved stone projecting cornice with dentil detail below and a distinctive name-block positioned in the center of the projecting parapet. Triangular-shaped cut stone lintels sit atop the tall, narrow double-hung windows on the second and third stories. The stone facades on the adjacent two-story buildings at 518, 520 and 526 Copeland are of similar construction. All of the street level facades of these buildings and the O'Neil Building have been greatly altered. However, two of these buildings still have the cast iron decorative support columns intact and exposed. In addition, the pressed metal cornice with star design is still intact at 520 Copeland.

Site 21: Roosevelt School
1307 Hayes St.
Built in 1923/1931

In the early 1920s as the school-age population of La Crosse continued to grow, the educational needs of the community were not being met by the outdated wood frame school buildings of the late 19th century. The educational leaders of La Crosse made a commitment to modernize and expand the elementary education system in the city. In four consecutive years beginning in 1920, four new elementary schools were built in La Crosse including Roosevelt School in 1923. Designed by local architect Otto Merman, Roosevelt School is the only one of the four new schools built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The original Spanish Colonial stylistic details of the two-story school include a red tile roof, pastel colored stucco exterior with contrasting brown brick surfaces, second story balcony window with bracketed cornice and iron railing, ornamental entry lamps and carved sandstone blind arch over the Palladian influenced entry. Arts and Crafts elements include a very symmetrical presentation, horizontal band of multi-paned windows and a battered (tapered) central bay and end walls. Although the red tile roof and windows and doors have been replaced, most of the original exterior is intact preserving the historic character of the building. The original carved red sandstone name/date block over the entry is intact as well.

The 1931 addition to the north was also designed by Merman and matches the original building in style and scale. Later additions over the following years do not. Roosevelt School is significant in that it is one of the few public buildings in La Crosse designed in a Mediterranean Revival style. It is also one of the most significant buildings of period architecture designed by local master architect Otto Merman, whose work had a major influence on builders in La Crosse through the first decades of the 20th century. Although still currently operated by the La Crosse School District, Roosevelt School has been threatened with closure and is considered an endangered architectural resource.

Site 22: St. Clara's Convent Apartments – St. Clara's Convent
1120 Caledonia St.
Built in 1893

Built as convent for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse who were teaching students in the St. James parish, the historic St. Clara's Convent building is one of only two remaining architecturally significant convent buildings in the city. The two-story red brick building has several horizontal limestone belt-courses that accent the window openings and rough-cut limestone foundation. The large central bay is highlighted by round-arched Romanesque Revival windows in the middle of the second story and in the facing gable end. The pediment over the porch/entry is inscribed with the name of the convent. The Italianate style paired brackets under the eaves and the Neo-Classical pediment with Palladian round arched windows contribute to the late Victorian eclectic appearance. The archival photo shows that major alterations were made to the entry and several gables were removed sometime after 1904. This building was the first major non-residential commission for local architect Andrew Roth.

St. Clara's Convent is one of three existing buildings historically associated with the North La Crosse St James Catholic parish. When the first St James Church burned in 1900, St Clara's served as the parish school as well as a convent. In 1956, St James parish purchased the convent while several FSPA sisters continued to reside there until 1988. In 1988 the parish sold the convent building and it was converted to a dentist's office and residence for Dr. Fred and Marie Kriemelmeyer. In 1989 the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse gave the Kriemelmeyers an award for their adaptive re-use of the building

Site 23: St. Elias Eastern Orthodox Church
716 Copeland Ave.
Built in 1912

One of the few remaining late 19th or early 20th century wood frame churches left in La Crosse with historic architectural integrity, St. Elias Orthodox Church has the steep gable roof and pointed arch windows, doors and decorative motifs that are typical of the Gothic Revival style. The cornice return and triple Palladian-style window above the entry are Neo-Classical design elements. In recent years the large arched stained glass window above the entry doors was restored. One of the distinguishing features of Orthodox churches that is intact in the St. Elias church is the iconostasis, a dividing wall that separates the sanctuary from the nave. The iconostasis at St. Elias features several icons drawn by local community members.

St. Elias has a very distinctive place in the history of Christian churches in La Crosse. At the turn of the 20th century, a small group of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants settled in the Copeland Street neighborhood. Many of these Arabic speaking Christian settlers were traveling salesmen, or peddlers, and were drawn to North La Crosse because it was located at the intersection of several rail lines. These Antiochian Orthodox Christians from Syria and Lebanon are descendants of one of the five early Christian patriarchies that were established in the eastern Mediterranean area in the very early Christian era, long before Christianity came to Europe. The St. Elias building was started in 1911 and completed in 1912 with mostly volunteer labor. Services began in 1917 and continued until 1938 at which time regular Sunday worship was suspended. In 1977 a full-time priest was called and regular services resumed. The St. Elias Orthodox community today includes members with Syrian/Lebanese, Greek, Russian and other eastern European roots. The St. Elias Orthodox Church is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark.

Site 24: St. James Catholic Church
1102 Caledonia St.
Built in 1900

St. James Catholic Church is a highly visible architectural/historical landmark of North La Crosse and one of the finest examples of a late Victorian interpretation of the Romanesque Revival style. The round arched windows, recessed round arched door openings and multiple rose windows are typical of the Romanesque Revival style. The red brick exterior with contrasting limestone and light colored brick detailing accentuate the decorative and functional elements. The simple rectangular basilica shape of the church is enhanced by a pair of square towers flanking the projecting central entrance, and a polygonal domed tower with Byzantine-influenced belfry located above and behind the entry. Other architectural elements include rounded corbel tables of light-colored brick located along the eaves, a downsized gable roofed transept and five-sided apse on the east side. The brick exterior of the church was sandblasted in 1953, but the church retains its overall architectural integrity.

St. James parish was organized in 1885 to serve the Irish and French communities of North La Crosse. The original wood frame church was built in 1886 and burned in 1900. Andrew Roth was the architect and Peter Nelson and Company the contractor for St. James Catholic Church that was begun in 1900 and completed in 1901. St. James Catholic Church was historically associated with St. Clara's Convent (1893) just to the north of the church. The parish community of St. John the Baptist Church (1892) formerly at 832 Avon, was combined with St. James in 1968 and the former St. John's building was razed in 1985. St. James Catholic School (1941) a few blocks away at 716 Windsor is the parochial school currently associated with St. James.

Site 25: St. James Catholic School
716 Windsor St.
Built in 1941

St. James Catholic School is historically associated with the St. James Church located one block to the north. A parochial school has been part of the St. James Parish since 1887, when the first St. James Church was built. The current St. James Catholic School was built in 1941 and is excellent example of the Art Deco style of architecture as expressed in a school building. The two-story cut limestone entry has a stepped projecting parapet and vertical fluting typical of this style. Religious icons and the parish name are inscribed on the entry as well. The rounded corners of the aluminum-clad canopy show some Art Moderne influence. The two-story three-bay brick façade is punctuated with large, nearly square window openings divided by vertical brick pilasters with limestone caps. The school building was designed by A. F. Brillmeyer and Sons of Wisconsin Rapids and built by local contractor Peter Nelson and Son.

Site 26: Sweet Shop – Gibson Ice Cream Shop
1113 Caledonia St.
Built ca. 1883

The Sweet Shop is a well known retail business in "Olde Town North" with a reputation for selling high quality locally made candies, chocolates, ice cream and other sweet treats. The two-story painted brick building has a typical vernacular architectural style seen in many commercial buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The most distinctive architectural elements are located along the top of the street facing façade in the pressed metal projecting cornice with bracketed ends. The half-round and dentil detailing seen horizontally along the cornice is highlighted by a contrasting color scheme. A stepped projecting parapet wall and segmental arched windows are typical of the late Victorian Commercial vernacular style as well.

The Sweet Shop began under the ownership of Cecil Allen in 1921 and has remained a family business since then. The current owner, Bill Espe is a grand-nephew of Cecil Allen and began working in the shop when he was 16 years old. Espe has continued the tradition of small batch candy and ice cream production and currently offers 90 varieties of homemade candy. The interior décor shows Art Deco influences that date back to the ownership under Cecil Allen in the 1920s. The marble soda fountain, wall, ceiling and floor finish are all intact and well maintained. The Preservation Alliance of La Crosse gave the Sweet Shop a preservation award in 1984 for “preserving a visually distinctive architectural interior and a functional and vital way of life.”

Site 27: Power House Marine – Wisconsin Light & Power Company
518 Logan St.
Built in 1905

The Wisconsin Power and Light Company building was built by local contractor Charles Noble on the site of the former McDonald sawmill on the east bank of the Black River. The electric plant produced electricity for North La Crosse, including power for the streetcar system. After the electric plant closed, the building was used by the Lorillard Tobacco Company for a period of time.

The basic footprint of the building is comprised of intersecting single and two-story rectangles creating an H-shaped mass. The Vernacular Commercial façade is divided into tall narrow recessed bays highlighted by rows of corbelled brick with brick dentiling across the top of the cornice. The first and second story windows feature segmental arches with limestone sills and insets. Although additions and alterations for other commercial uses over the years have somewhat altered the exterior, the façade is mostly intact and retains its historic character.

Site 28: Old North Port Condominiums – Lorillard Tobacco Co.
1501 Rose St.
Built in 1919

The sowing of tobacco crops was first brought to Wisconsin by Yankees from Connecticut who settled in the Dane County area in the years just before the Civil War. Later, Norwegian immigrants brought the tobacco culture to Vernon County and other parts of western Wisconsin in the 1870s. Tobacco raising became an important cash crop for many farmers in western Wisconsin in the first half of the 20th century. P. Lorillard Tobacco Company is an old east coast tobacco company that established a manufacturing plant in North La Crosse after the lumber industry disappeared. Most of the tobacco raised in western Wisconsin was used for cigar wrappers (note the preponderance of women in the archival photo of Lorillard employees in front of the building).

The L-shaped two-story brick former industrial building has a rather simple un-ornamented façade but is decorated with several Neo-Classical elements. These include a dentiled brick cornice on the two-story section and a cut limestone projecting cornice on the one story entrance section. The entry has a Neo-Classical frontispiece capped by a curvilinear broken pediment supported by a cut limestone cornice with modillions below. Even though the window openings have been reduced from the original size and scale, the Lorillard building is a well-preserved early 20th century commercial building connected to the industrial history of North La Crosse.

Site 29: North Community Library
1522 Kane St.
Built in 1942

The two-story brick Tudor Revival style North Community Library was architecturally designed with a “bungalow” appearance in mind, in order to fit in with the surrounding residential neighborhood. Tudor Revival elements include a steeply pitched slate roof with intersecting gables, half-timbered gable end and projecting bay with decorative brackets, second story oriel window and Tudor arched entry. The cut limestone trim around the entry door and main window have a distinctive right-angled cornice detail that is a typical feature of Tudor Revival buildings. The diamond-shaped multi-paned windows are another distinctive stylistic element. The interior features the original “Old English” leaded glass windows, exposed oak beams, window seats and fireplace.

The North Branch Library began as a reading room in a storefront on Caledonia Street in 1904. Increased use in the 1920s created a demand for a new library building in North La Crosse. Otto Merman created the design in 1923, but it was not until sufficient funding became available through a referendum in 1941 that construction began on the library building seven years after Merman’s death at the age of 45 in 1935. Today, the North Community Library is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark and it continues to provide valuable educational and community services to North La Crosse.

Site 30: Buzz’s Bikes – Exchange Building (North)/Masonic Temple
800 Rose St.
Built in 1887/1889

The finest example of high-style Late Victorian architecture in the former Rose Street commercial district the Exchange State Bank/Masonic Temple is actually two buildings built two years apart at the height of financial prosperity in North La Crosse. The bank building was built on the northeast corner of Rose and St Cloud Streets in

1887 and two years later the Masonic Temple was built in the same style and scale around the bank to the north and east (note the slight variation in brick color). The most prominent feature of the two-story red brick building is the cantilevered octagonal bay or turret over the corner entry. The turret is supported by cast iron Corinthian columns. A pressed metal projecting cornice with decorative brackets is topped by two gabled pediments with inset name blocks. The tall narrow segmental arched windows have cut limestone keystones and corner insets. Three large round arched second story windows have blind arches with decorative glazed red tile surfaces. The irregular mass and window placement, corner turret and highly ornamented exterior are all elements typical of the Queen Anne commercial style. Architect William Parker designed many of the finest commercial, public and residential buildings in La Crosse during the last three decades of the 19th century.

Henry and Edwin Magill organized the Magill Brothers Bank in 1884 in downtown La Crosse. The Magill Brothers Bank moved into the Rose Street building in 1887 and in 1889 the bank was renamed the Exchange State Bank. The Exchange State Bank operated for over seventy years in this location until 1962 when it moved to 1300 Rose Street. The Masons of North La Crosse organized in 1873 and moved into the Rose Street building in 1889 and continued to meet in this location until the 1970s. Although the windows of the Masonic Temple section of the building have been filled in with concrete block, the building has architectural and historic significance for North La Crosse. The Exchange Bank Building/Masonic Temple is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark and currently is the home to a bike and boat shop.

