

Footsteps of La Crosse

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME & ARCHITECTURE



Additional National Register Properties

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of cultural resources, i.e. buildings, structures, objects and sites worthy of preservation. The NRHP was authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and part of an overall national program to support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect historic resources. The register is administered by the Department of the Interior and provides tax credits to property owners who qualify their buildings under the criteria of the program. Contrary to popular opinion the National Register designation provides no protection whatsoever to the listed property; with some minor exceptions. In other words, property owners of listed properties are free to do anything they wish to their property under the program, including demolition. The designation process is lengthy and closely reviewed, and therefore provides an important level of recognition of historic distinction to successfully nominated properties.

In Wisconsin the first stage of the National Register nomination process is to have the nominated property reviewed by the state Historic Preservation Review Board for listing on the State Register. If the property meets the criteria of architectural and historic significance, the nomination then goes to the National Parks Service for listing on the National Register. If a property is listed on the State Register acceptance to the National Register is all but assured. All National Register properties in La Crosse are on both the State and National Registers. Currently in the city of La Crosse there are 23 individual properties on the State and National Register and three historic districts.

Site 1: Mons Anderson House
410 Cass St.
Built in 1854/1878

The Mons Anderson House is one of the finest examples of mid-nineteenth century residential architecture in western Wisconsin. The home is a rare blend of Gothic Revival and Italian Villa styles rendered in locally quarried limestone. The home has a fascinating history; from a peak of late Victorian era opulence in the late 19th century, to neglect and near ruin by the later part of the 20th century, to its current state of complete restoration and recognition as one of the most historic and architecturally significant homes in the city of La Crosse.

Mons Anderson (1830-1905) was born in Norway, came to America as a young man, first settling in Milwaukee and arriving in La Crosse in 1851 at the age of 21. He began as a store clerk but soon bought out his employer and began a business of his own. He prospered in the mercantile trade, and by 1865 started a large retail store that when finished in 1870 was one of the largest stores of its kind in the upper Midwest. So successful was Mons Anderson that during his lifetime he became the most prominent merchandiser in La Crosse and was known as the "Merchant Prince". He was a leading supplier of boots and clothing to lumbermen in the region and was a key figure in the economic development of La Crosse in the late 19th century. He even issued his own currency, examples of which are still found in private collections in La Crosse.

As Mons Anderson's retail career was on the rise he purchased a simple two story stone house on Cass Street built in 1854 by stonemason Alexander W Shephard, a New York native. In 1865 Anderson hired noted local architect William H J Nichols to design a series of high style additions that when completed in 1878 made the Mons Anderson House one of the most spacious and elegant homes in La Crosse. After the death of Mons Anderson the home was sold to the YWCA in 1906 and used as their facility until the 1920s when it returned to later returned to individual private ownership. Over the next 60 years the once opulent home slid into disrepair and deterioration. In 1982 the historic residence was purchased at auction by Robert Poehling who completely refurbished this city landmark. By the mid-1980s the restored Mons Anderson House received several local and statewide awards for architectural significance and historic preservation.

The exterior features a distinctive three story central tower with mansard roof and ornamental iron balustrade. This tower along with the quadruple-arched loggia lend an Italian Villa aspect to the house. Other elements including the lancet windows and ornamental stonework show the Gothic Revival influence in the building. The interior contains 16 main rooms and several alcoves, halls, closets and small side rooms. The exquisite interior decor features parquet flooring, six intricately detailed fireplaces, a hand-crafted staircase, numerous unusual statuary niches and period

wall and ceiling finish. The highlight of the interior is the south facing library with black walnut paneling and bookshelves, wood mosaic flooring, vaulted ceiling and carved marble fireplace ornamented from the mantel to the ceiling with hand-crafted eight inch square painted tiles considered to be of the highest artistic value. With the closing of the Chateau La Crosse bed and breakfast business in the house, future of this landmark property is uncertain. The Mons Anderson House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and is a City of La Crosse Historic Landmark.

Site 2: Chase and Wohuter Bungalows
221-223 11th St. South
Built in 1913

Significant as a unique examples of architecturally designed Prairie Style bungalows these twin single story two bedroom bungalows were built for local dentist Dr. H . H. Chase and his friend Henry Wolhuter. Both residences were designed by noted local architect Percy Dwight Bentley at the beginning of his Prairie Style period. Situated on narrow deep lots, these bungalows have distinctive Prairie School features including a low pitch horizontal roof with exaggerated overhanging eaves, contrasting exterior surfaces, broad flat chimney, obscured entry on the side and geometric patterned leaded glass windows. The homes have a rather typical bungalow floor plan. Although quite compact the room layout provides long vistas down the halls and through the main living areas. Distinctive Prairie Style elements are also evident in the interior especially the ceiling strips, horizontal wooden bands, casement windows, inglenook and fireplace.

Percy Dwight Bentley (1885-1968) was born in La Crosse, the son of a wealthy banker. He studied architecture in Chicago from 1907-1910 where he was heavily influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. Bentley brought Prairie Style architecture to La Crosse and along with his associate Otto Merman, designed the finest Prairie Style homes in the city, most of them located in the Cass/King NRHP Residential District to the east. As a result of Bentley and Merman's influence more than a hundred Prairie Style influenced homes were built in La Crosse from 1910 to 1936. Each of the properties have matching original Prairie Style garages with shared driveway. The Chase/Wolhuter Bungalows were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 and are featured in several books on the Prairie Style architecture of the upper Midwest.

Site 3: Christ Episcopal Church
831 Main St.
Built in 1898

The Christ Episcopal Church is an outstanding example of Richardsonian Romanesque Style architecture in an ecclesiastical application. Located four blocks east of the historic downtown district this church building is a highly visible example of the wealth and prominence of La Crosse at the turn of the 20th century. The Romanesque Revival style of architecture was popularized in America by Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) of Boston, Massachusetts, and is typified by round arched motifs for doors, windows and decoration; multiple towers and turrets and heavy stone asymmetrical massing with contrasting color surfaces. The most dramatic structural element of Christ Episcopal Church is the 92-foot tower on the southeast corner that is highlighted with round arched corner turrets and tall octagonal roof. The use of locally quarried limestone with contrasting reddish-brown sandstone trim and decorative elements is a hallmark of the late 19th century Romanesque style. The cruciform plan with intersecting transepts is also in the tradition of high-style 19th century church design. The massive round arched Tiffany window located in the center of the south transept was donated in honor of church member Angus Cameron. Another equally large and intricate, but less visible, stained glass window is located on the north transept in honor of Frank Hixon. An addition to the north built for religious education in 1962 does not detract from the architectural integrity of the church.

The Episcopal Church in La Crosse, established in the 1850s, was one of the pioneer religious communities in the region. By the late 1800s many prominent and prosperous families in the community attended this church. These included the families of Henry Gund (brewing), both Frank and Joseph Hixon (business and finance) Gysbert Van Steenwyck (banking) and Judge B. F. Bryant and General Orlando Holway. A small wood frame Gothic Revival Style church was built on the site in 1864 (see photo) and was razed in April of 1898 to make way for the new church. The size and high style elegance of the new church was due, in part, to the anticipation of La Crosse becoming the seat of a new Episcopal Diocese. That honor later went to the Episcopal community in Eau Claire. Christ Episcopal Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and honored as a City of La Crosse Historic Landmark in 1995.

Site 4: Gideon C. Hixon House
429 7th St. North
Built in 1859/1869/1881/1883

The Italianate Style Gideon Hixon House is one of the most historically significant homes in La Crosse and one of the premier house museums in the state of Wisconsin. What distinguishes this historic home is not so much the

architecture but the unique history of preservation and protection of the interior décor. Because of good fortune and the vision of one of the Hixon family members, the furnishings and furniture of the Hixon House have been preserved intact and on site and provide an unequalled insight into the lives of a wealthy La Crosse family at the turn of the 20th century. Although a simplified interpretation of the Italianate Style, the Hixon House has a cross gabled mass with stylistically appropriate tall narrow windows, open porch with neo-classical elements and decorative entablature with dentiling and paired brackets.

Gideon Hixon (1826-1892) was one of several Yankee entrepreneurs who settled in the Upper Mississippi region and profited enormously from the Lumber Era boom and ensuing growth in the region. At the time of his death he was regarded as one of the most enterprising and successful lumbermen of the Upper Mississippi region. The relatively modest two-story, wood frame, four room home (see historic sketch) on 7th and Badger Streets was built by Gideon Hixon for his second wife Ellen Pennell Hixon (1839-1913) in 1859. They had five sons, and added on to the house to numerous times as the family and Gideon's business grew. Major alterations were made beginning in 1869 culminating in the last addition to the footprint of the house in 1883. In the early years of the 20th century Ellen Hixon redecorated much of the interior in the Aesthetic fashion that she had seen in Europe using British Arts and Crafts wallpaper and fabrics. The Turkish Nook is another of Ellen's innovations that reflects the popularity of the "exotic East" at the turn of the 20th century.

Gideon Hixon's sons followed the path of their hardworking father in the world of business and high finance in La Crosse and environs. However, by the early decades of the 20th century most of the Hixons had left La Crosse for careers and family elsewhere. It was Alice Green Hixon (1883-1982), the second wife of Frank Hixon (1862-1931) Gideon's oldest son; who deserves the credit for preserving the Hixon family home and furnishings. She wished to maintain the home with the furnishings intact as a place for family to gather at holidays and for other special occasions. Alice Hixon was concerned that the Hixon home would have the same fate as many other late 19th century mansions and be converted to a funeral home or rental property. In her generous gift of the Hixon property to the La Crosse County Historical Society in 1962, Alice Hixon stipulated that the house was to be torn down rather than be sold for other than historical society purposes.

Fortunately for the city of La Crosse the LCHS has not only preserved the family home but created an historical and architectural gem that is a key attraction of Historic Downtown La Crosse. This became possible with financial assistance from the Jeffris Foundation, Hixon family members and dozens of other contributors in the region. River Architects of La Crosse and several of the best interior décor conservators cooperated with many LCHS staff and volunteers in this highly recognized and well-documented million dollar project that was completed in 2005. The Gideon Hixon House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and is a La Crosse City Historic Landmark. The Hixon House Museum is open to the public for tours from May through October and by arrangement. Call 608-782-1980 for more information.

Site 5: Main Hall, La Crosse Normal School / Graff Main Hall, UW-La Crosse
1725 State St.
Built 1909

La Crosse Normal School is one of a series of statewide teacher education institutions established in Wisconsin at the peak of the Progressive Era at the turn of the 20th century. Begun in 1908 and completed in 1909, Main Hall was the first building of the new normal school and housed all of the school's educational activities until the Physical Education building (Wittich Hall) was built in 1916.

Displaying Neo-Classical influences associated with public and educational buildings in the early 20th century, Main Hall is one of the most architecturally significant examples of historic educational architecture in La Crosse. Neo-Classical elements of the three-story red brick building include a central bay with decorative arched entry, massive flanking bays highlighted by brick pilasters capped with a classical entablature and projecting cornice. The roofline is accented with a stepped pedimented parapet atop the cut limestone cornice. The red brick façade is accented with cut limestone belt courses, keystones, and sills. (Note the inscribed dedication date over the main entry) A short octagonal tower projects from the west elevation. Additions and alterations to the exterior of the building over the years have been minimal and sympathetic.

The establishment of a State Normal School at La Crosse made the city into a regionally important educational center. The presence of the school over the past 100 years has had a major impact on the surrounding neighborhood and the socio-economic development of the city in general. The name changes over the years reflect the growth of the school from a relatively small teacher prep commuter campus to a major four-year liberal arts institution:

1909-1927 La Crosse Normal School
1927-1951 La Crosse State Teachers College
1951-1964 La Crosse State College
1964-1971 La Crosse State University
1971- today University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

Today, Main/Graff Hall houses the offices of the Chancellor and administrative staff, a 600-seat auditorium and approximately 35 classrooms and specialized instructional areas. Main Hall was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Main Hall was renamed Maurice O. Graff Hall after a popular former administrator in 1997.

Site 6: St. Rose Chapel / Maria Angelorum Chapel
901 Franciscan Way
Built 1901-1906

The Maria Angelorum Chapel was built for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin over a five-year period beginning in the summer of 1901 with completion and consecration on August 2, 1906. The towering red brick Romanesque Revival style chapel was designed by Milwaukee architect Eugene R Liebert based on a traditional early Christian cruciform shape with high style decorative round arched elements inspired by models from central and southern Europe. The distinctive city landmark is the site of round-the-clock prayer, a religious practice central to the identity of the order of Franciscans who reside in the adjacent convent.

The footprint of the chapel is a traditional cross-shaped form with multiple arms, including two pairs of pyramidal twin towers on the east and west end with a massive central tower over the transept and buttressed apse on the east end containing the Adoration Chapel. The roof is covered by glazed red and green roof tiles. The highly ornamental brick exterior rests on a cut limestone basement wall. Rounded Romanesque Revival architectural details include blind arcading along the eaves; segmental arched window, door and belfry openings; three stained glass rose windows with stone tracery and buttresses on all sides. The spectacular neo-European interior finish and statuary was commissioned to regional craftsman steeped in the centuries-old artisan tradition of central Europe. More than 100 stained glass windows were imported from the Royal Bavarian Art Institute of Munich, Germany. The Egid Hackner Altar Company of La Crosse provided the main altars and ornate carved furnishings. The bronze doors, frescoing, gold leaf finishing, mosaic tile and massive electric chandeliers create a breathtaking old world feel to the interior of both chapels. The exterior of the chapel is essentially intact and unaltered and remains the finest surviving example of historic Romanesque Revival architecture in western Wisconsin.

An extensive cleaning and renovation of the chapel interior completed in the 1990s has enhanced the historic integrity of this local landmark. In 1865 the FSPA founders made a two-fold promise for the religious community in hopes of establishing perpetual adoration (constant round-the-clock prayer) and building “as fine a chapel as means would allow”. Perpetual Adoration was begun on August 1, 1878 and almost 28 years later the Maria Angelorum Chapel was consecrated on August 2, 1906. That promise continues today in the prayer of the sisters and in the presence of the historic chapel in the heart of the Franciscan campus. The Maria Angelorum Chapel was listed on the National Registers of Historic Places in time for the chapel centennial celebration in August of 2006. The Mary of the Angels Chapel is visited yearly by thousands of worshippers and tourists.

Site 7: City Water Works / Pump House
119 King St.
Built 1880/1895

The former City Water Works building (now known as The Pump House) is the only surviving example of Romanesque Revival civic architecture in La Crosse. The dark red brick two-story building is a simplified interpretation of the Romanesque style but still retains many of its original late 19th century elements. These details include the distinctive central bay with a segmental brick blind round arch over the battered entry and carved limestone date block. Light colored cut limestone window sills contrast with the red brick exterior. On the first floor the thick sills extend in a belt course adding a horizontal element to the two-story mass. The red tile roof and segmental round arched windows on the west section enhance the historic appearance of the building.

The original single story brick structure was built as the first City Water Works in 1880 (see archival photo), and later enlarged to a two-story building designed by civil engineer John Cole in 1895 (see archival sketches). This much larger building retained and expanded on the Romanesque motif and included a grandiose central tower with elongated round arched windows and tall pyramidal roof (note the Cargill grain elevators in the background).

This building served as the City Water Works until 1914, when increased demand for water required a larger water plant. This new water works was built near Myrick Park on the La Crosse River marsh and is in use today. The old City Waterworks remained vacant until the La Crosse Tractor Company occupied the building for a brief time in 1919 and 1920. After the departure of the tractor company, beginning in 1926, building was used for general utility needs including repair and storage purposes by the City Street Department. In the late 1930s several alterations were made to the structure including alteration of the windows and entry and most regrettably a drastic reduction in the height of the tower.

In 1977 after the City Street Department combined facilities in a new location, the City Council considered razing the former Water Works building. Two years earlier in 1975, a group of community volunteers had organized a regional arts alliance that needed a home. After much debate in June of 1977 the City Council agreed to lease the endangered building to the nascent group of area artists and performers. The Western Wisconsin Regional Arts organization opened in the former City Water Works in 1979. The City of La Crosse currently owns the building, however

maintenance and operation is provided by the private non-profit Pump House Regional Arts Center. Much of the interior woodwork and doors were salvaged from the former Post Office/Federal Building that was torn down in 1977. The Pump House is currently an active site for the visual and performing arts in La Crosse and the surrounding region. The Pump House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and is a City of La Crosse Historic Landmark.

Site 8: Losey Memorial Arch, Oak Grove Cemetery
1407 La Crosse St.
Built 1901

The Losey Memorial Arch is located at the entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery on the north side of La Crosse Street. The impressive triple arched stone entry was built in 1901 as a memorial to civic leader Joseph W. Losey. The Losey Memorial Arch was designed in the Classical Revival Style by local architects Hugo Schick and Andrew Roth in 1901. The Classical Revival Style is an early 20th century interpretation of ancient Greek and Roman design motifs, and was very popular for public buildings and memorials in the first decade of the 20th century. The triple Palladian style arch has four Corinthian capped pilasters, projecting cornice with decorative modillions and brass nameplate with a dedication to Joseph W. Losey. The foundation is red sandstone and the bulk of the decorative arch is high-quality Bedford limestone. The arch was erected by the Crosby and Hynne Granite Company of La Crosse and dedicated with a public celebration on Memorial Day in 1902.

Joseph Losey (1834-1901) was born in Pennsylvania and came to La Crosse in 1856 to study law with a local attorney. He was admitted to the bar in 1857 and soon developed a thriving private law practice in the booming river town. Losey was elected District Attorney in 1859 and City Attorney in 1860. Losey was also long-time member of the City Council where he helped establish a water system for fire protection. He was also an early supporter of the development of Myrick Park. Losey is probably best known for advocating the creation of a European style pleasure drive, or boulevard, on the eastern edge of the city, known today as Losey Boulevard. His tireless efforts to restore and beautify the Oak Grove Cemetery led to the naming of the entry arch in his honor after his death in 1901. For over a century, the arch has been a symbol of Oak Grove Cemetery as well as a memorial to one of the city's most public-spirited citizens. The Losey Memorial Arch was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 and is also a La Crosse City Historic Landmark. The Oak Grove Cemetery Association would welcome your donations to help restore this historic site.

