

Footsteps of La Crosse

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME & ARCHITECTURE



DOWNTOWN TOUR OVERVIEW

The roughly five-block La Crosse Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994 and contains 110 buildings, of which 96 are considered contributing to the historic architectural character of the district. City officials and downtown business leaders in La Crosse clearly see the connection between a prosperous city center and historic preservation.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded the City of La Crosse a Great American Main Street Award in 2002 for the city's successful efforts in downtown revitalization through historic preservation. As you walk through the historic district you will notice the mix of specialty retail, dining and entertainment offerings that are the key to economic vitality of the downtown. Another key element in sustaining the city center is the improvement and adaptive re-use of upper stories for residential use. Although there continue to be economic challenges in the core downtown, La Crosse has a well-deserved reputation in the upper mid-west as a success story of historic preservation and downtown revitalization.

This tour leads you to 30 sites and follows the history of the city from the boomtown riverboat days through the roaring 20's through the evolution of building styles and details. As you walk the three blocks from Second Street to Fifth Avenue away from the riverfront and Riverside Park, you will see the progression of architectural styles that reflect the historical development of downtown La Crosse. Nearly one hundred years of La Crosse commercial history can be observed in the earliest surviving buildings that date from the 1860s on Second Avenue to the historic styles of the mid-twentieth century seen along Fifth Avenue. Along the way you will be introduced to excellent commercial examples of Italianate, Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne architecture from the 19th century as well as Chicago Commercial, Art Deco and Art Moderne buildings from the early to mid twentieth century.

Enjoy your tour of downtown La Crosse and don't forget to "look up" to see the architectural character of the historic downtown buildings!

Site 1: Healy Block/Yahr Lange Building-Powell Place/Yoko's Restaurant
200-212 Main St.
Built in 1872-1878

Best known as Powell Place for its association with the legendary Dr. Frank Powell, this is actually a collection of three Italianate buildings built by local developer Benjamin Healy in the 1870s. Powell Place is one of the finest examples of Commercial Italianate architecture and an early example of adaptive re-use in the downtown area. The interior was completely remodeled for retail use in 1983 and features a "mall plan" with interior halls directing shoppers to various commercial establishments. The east end of the building has been the location of a number of specialty restaurants over the past 25 years. Powell Place was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

Dr. Frank Powell (1847-1906), also known as "Doc Powell" or the "White Beaver", established the Powell Institute with his brothers William and George in 1881. The clinic specialized in treating "diseases of women" and dispensing various patent medicines. The three Powell brothers were born in Kentucky to a medical doctor of Scots ancestry and a mother whose father was a Seneca chief from upstate New York. Frank apparently had some medical training and worked in several drugstores before heading west to Nebraska to serve as an Army doctor. It was during the period of the Indian Wars in the 1860s that the three brothers, and Frank in particular, associated with legendary Indian fighter and frontiersman Buffalo Bill Cody. Frank and his brothers developed a reputation as high-spirited sharpshooters and Indian scouts. These three young frontiersmen were known to their rough riding comrades-in-arms as "White Beaver" (Frank), "Night Hawk" or "Dark Scout" (George) and "Bronco Billy" or "Saddle King" (William). Blending his schooling in herbal remedies that he learned from his mother along with some medical training at a college in Louisville, Kentucky, Frank moved "back east" to Lanesboro, Minnesota, in 1876 where he

practiced medicine and surgery. In 1881 he moved to La Crosse and set up a medical practice at 200 Main Street, which he continued with his brothers for over twenty years. All three brothers maintained their “frontier” appearance during these years with long hair, broad-brimmed hats, long black overcoats and western boots. Frank Powell was elected mayor of La Crosse four times and was one of the most colorful characters in 19th century La Crosse history.

Site 2: Rodolf Building – Citywear/Kick
100 3rd St. South
Built in 1868, 1870, 1878

Located on the southwest corner of Third and Main Streets in the heart of downtown La Crosse, the three-story, red-brick Rodolf Building is the oldest surviving example of Commercial Italianate architecture in the city. Cast iron elements used in the remodeling of the Rodolf Block in 1891 were supplied by the John Torrance Foundry of La Crosse. Like many commercial buildings built in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the street level façade of the Rodolf Block was significantly altered years ago and is now being rehabilitated. New tenants include two specialty shops with plans for offices and living space on the upper floors.

The Rodolf Block, which was built in three nearly equal-sized sections in 1868, 1870 and 1878, became the center of the city’s social life for many years. This prominent downtown building became the home of several fraternal organizations serving the Norwegian and German-speaking population in La Crosse. The Young Men’s Library Association also met in the Rodolf Block until their merger with the La Crosse Public Library in 1888. The first meeting place for the YMCA in La Crosse was in the Rodolf Block. One of the longest residing and best-known tenants was the La Crosse Business College which opened in the Rodolf Block in 1872. The Rodolf Block is historically significant for La Crosse because of its long-time association with numerous fraternal and social organizations in the city during the historic period of social and economic growth in the late 19th century.

Site 3: Gantert Building – Antique Center

110 3rd St. South
Built in 1874, 1885

The well-preserved façade of the Gantert Furniture Building contributes to the historic streetscape along the west side of the 100 block of Third Street. The three-story painted brick façade features decorative elements common to the Commercial Italianate style, including a projecting corbelled cornice, tall narrow windows with ornate hood moldings and capped brick pilasters that define the three-bay upper level. The cornice also features the owner’s name and date blocks indicating the original section built in 1874 and two additional sections built eleven years later. The street level recessed entries and large plate glass windows reflect the original scale and size of the openings and are framed by decorative cast iron columns.

Stephen Gantert started his furniture business in La Crosse in 1863 and three generations of his descendants operated the business into the 1990s. One of the finest and best-preserved Queen Anne style homes is the Stephen Gantert residence (1891) at 1301 Main Street.

Site 4: Charles B. Solberg Building – Markos Clothing
127-129 3rd St. South
Built in 1870

One of the earliest and finest surviving examples of Commercial Italianate architecture in the downtown is the three-story painted brick Solberg grocery building built in 1870 and enlarged in 1876. Distinguishing features include a projecting metal cornice decorated with modillions and paired brackets that define two bays on the west side and five bays on the south. The frieze just below the cornice features round medallions. The tall narrow windows with highly ornamented arched window hoods/lintels on the second and third story reflect the Italianate influence. An elaborate corbelled beltcourse divides the first story from the second story and a narrow decorative beltcourse with a circular motif divides the second from the third story.

Norwegian immigrant Charles B. Solberg provided temporary housing for his newly arrived countrymen in this three-story building as it was under construction in 1870. It was nicknamed "Castle Garden" after the major New York immigration port. Later the grocery building became home to the Norwegian Workingmen’s Society. The Solberg Building is best known as the first location of the Gundersen Clinic. Norwegian immigrants Adolf Gundersen and Christen Christensen established a clinic here soon after arriving in La Crosse in the 1890s. The Markos family of Syrian/Lebanese background has operated a clothing store here for many decades. The interior first floor remains intact with original hardwood floors and woodwork.

Site 5: C. & J. Michel Building – Big Al’s Pizzeria
113-115 3rd St. South
Built in 1892

The colorful façade of the C. and J. Michel Building features a bracketed metal cornice, two well-preserved two-story metal-clad oriel windows and a highly visible name block centrally placed on the projecting parapet wall. The otherwise plain brick façade shows contrasting cut limestone sills, lintels and stringcourses. Designed by the local architectural firm of Stoltze and Schick, both German-speaking immigrants, this building exhibits a mix of commercial Queen Anne and Italianate elements and has been described as Late Victorian Eclectic. Gustav Stolze and Hugo Schick had an architectural partnership from 1887 to 1889 and designed many of the extant late 19th century commercial buildings in downtown La Crosse. The C. and J. Michel Building exhibits strong architectural character and is an important contribution to the Third Street historic streetscape. The alterations to the first level façade show some sensitivity to the historic character of the upper two stories.

German immigrants Charles and John Michel started a brewing business together in 1857 and incorporated as the C. and J. Michel Brewery in 1882. Like many breweries of the time, the Michel's opened "sampling rooms" that served beer from their brewery. Of the fourteen breweries that operated in La Crosse in the late 19th century, the Michel Brewery was one of four that became large, well established companies. The Michel Brewery survived Prohibition and operated as the "La Crosse Brewery" until its acquisition by G Heileman in 1965. The C. and J. Michel Building also housed the White House Dry Goods Store in the 1890s. The Bijou Theatre was located on the second floor from 1906-1910 and was the site of performances by Al Jolson and Buster Keaton.

Site 6: Moeller/Ficker Building-Grounded Coffee
308 Main St.
Built circa 1865

An excellent example of restoration/rehabilitation of a formerly unsympathetically altered 19th century storefront, this building also has a restored interior that reflects its historic appearance. An early example of brick Commercial Vernacular design, architectural elements include a projecting cornice with paired brackets, plain frieze with dentil detail below, tall narrow windows and simple slightly pedimented window hoods that show some transitional commercial Greek Revival influence (see 211-215 Pearl Street description). The original transom window and period appropriate recessed entry and plate glass windows enhance the heritage appearance. The second story floor has been removed and the second story pressed metal ceiling is visible from the ground floor. Historic uses include a variety of retail and service businesses. This building currently is the home of an owner-operated specialty coffee shop.

Site 7: State Bank Building-North Central Trust Company
311 Main St.
Built in 1885

The two-story red brick and terra cotta tile State Bank Building is a commercial interpretation of the Queen Anne style with an asymmetrical façade decorated with fish-scale cladding, decorative terra cotta tiles in an ornamental cross gable and a second story three-panel oriel window with leaded glass transom window and festooned frieze below the metal projecting cornice. Contrasting stone, brick and tile accents create a polychromatic appearance; a variety of color and texture typical of the Queen Anne style. Architect William Parker was a New York native who designed several important commercial and public buildings in the 1880s. The oriel window was restored after removal in the early 1960s.

The John M. Holley and Emil N. Borresen Bank was organized in 1879 and incorporated in 1883 with D. D. McMillan as president. The State Bank of La Crosse was one of the three most important financial institutions in the city during the historic period (see McMillan Building - 401 Main Street description). Until recent years this building was home to the La Crosse (later North Central) Trust Company.

Site 8: Linker Hotel-Lynne Tower
318-320 Main St.
Built in 1915, 1927

The dark brown brick eight-story Linker Hotel building is one of the tallest buildings in the downtown and an excellent example of the Chicago Commercial style. Originally a three story commercial structure erected in 1915 the upper five stories were added in 1927. The Chicago Commercial style evolved in the last two decades of the 19th century as the city was rebuilding after the devastating Chicago Fire of 1871. Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and several others developed a simple, utilitarian commercial style that accentuated function but also displayed an aesthetic reflecting Classical and Arts and Crafts influences. The tall narrow façade of the Linker Building has several of these stylistic motifs including the balanced symmetrical façade, evenly placed windows divided vertically by brick piers and the contrasting dark brown brick and light limestone cornice, belt-course and keystones. Distinctive Sullivanesque decorative elements are the low-relief terra cotta decorative bands below the eighth story windows and just below the cornice (remember to look up!).

Henry Linker, a German immigrant and one of a family of barbers, bought a barber shop and bath soon after arriving in La Crosse in 1881. By 1890, Henry's brothers Charles and George also joined the business. By 1895 Charles and George were plying their trade as the Linker Bros. Barber Shop and Turkish Bath Rooms. By the turn of the century

they had moved into a new building, the Linker Building, on the opposite side of street at 328 Main Street. In 1915, the Linkers built another new building, The Linker Hotel, Barber Shop and Turkish Bath, at this location, 318-320 Main Street. Here the Linker business remained until the hotel came under a new management in 1937 and the lower floor and lobby were completely remodeled. By the 1962 it was called the Lynne Tower Hotel. It was no longer used as a hotel by 1966 and housed mainly professional offices in the upper floors and retail business on the street level. Currently the building is used for retail, office and condo space.

Site 9: Batavian Bank Building
319-321 Main St.
Built in 1887-1888

The four-story limestone Richardsonian Romanesque Revival Batavian Bank is one of the most architecturally and historically significant buildings in the downtown. This interpretation of the Richardsonian Romanesque style by Chicago-based architect Solon Spencer Beman exhibits the heavy massing and repeated round arch motif which are the hallmarks of this style that was very popular in commercial, public and church buildings in 1880s and 1890s. The triple-arch form is established on the first floor and repeated on the third floor and fourth floors. The fourth floor arched colonnade is especially evocative of the Romanesque style that has historic roots in Western Europe in the millennium after the fall of the Roman Empire. Historic photos show the original ornate entrance on the east end and the battered stone foundation walls. The roof overhang is ornamented with a row of modillions. Of particular interest is the Sullivan-esque carved floral decoration located on the horizontal spandrels between the second and third floor and at the top of the massive piers on each corner. Also note the “BB” on the shield in the middle of the spandrels representing the Batavian Bank.

A major remodeling in 1927 moved the entry from the center of the building to the east side and the first floor was further altered by the replacement of the ashlar limestone surface with polished red granite in 1957. The bay windows on the south and west façade were also removed or reduced from their original size. In spite of these alterations, the Batavian Bank remains one of the pivotal buildings in the National Register Commercial District and an important surviving example of the Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style in La Crosse.

Gysbert Van Steenwyk (1814-1902) was a Dutch-born pioneer La Crosse banker who was instrumental in the financial development of the city during the early settlement years. Born and educated in Utrecht, Van Steenwyk emigrated in 1849 and settled in Milwaukee where he established himself in the governmental and financial world. He came to La Crosse already quite wealthy and influential and he established the Batavian Bank in 1861. An active Democrat, Van Steenwyk served as mayor of La Crosse (1873) and was later elected to the State Legislature and State Senate (1879). In addition to banking and politics, Van Steenwyk had numerous business interests in railroads, lumber and milling. Perhaps his most important contribution was as president of the Batavian Bank, which provided capital for many nascent La Crosse industries that were key to the growth of the city. True to his homeland, he named his bank after the Republic of Batavia, which was the name of the Netherlands during the Napoleonic Era.

Site 10: Rivoli Building and Theater
115-123 4th St. North
Built in 1920

The massive four-story cream brick Rivoli Theatre was built to house offices and retail storefronts as well as a theater. The Chicago Commercial style influence is seen in the nearly symmetrical façade divided by pilasters capped by terra cotta medallions with three stories of horizontally arranged four-over-one windows. The storefronts have been altered and the aluminum –clad main entry and cantilevered marquee likely date from the middle of the 20th century.

The Rivoli Theatre was designed by the local architectural firm of Parkinson and Dockendorff and built by local contractor Joseph Schwalbe and Son. Bernard Dockendorff and English-born Albert Parkinson designed many of the most significant surviving Early Modern (1900-1940) commercial and public buildings in the city. The interior originally designed by Odin J. Oyen was re-done in a Spanish Courtyard motif in the 1930s and is still intact. The Rivoli Theatre is the oldest and only currently operating movie theater in downtown La Crosse.

Site 11: Wisconsin Telephone Building – River Architects
125 4th St. North
Built in 1901, 1920

One of the finest examples of the Neo-Classical style in downtown La Crosse, this two-story building features a cut stone projecting cornice with dentiling and horizontal brick beltcourses highlighting the light brown brick façade. Ornamental details are of a similar light brown terra cotta. The projecting main entry is flanked by classical Doric columns supporting a name-block entablature topped by a dentiled projecting cornice. A metal railing decorates the top of the entrance. The secondary entrance on State Street features cut stone moldings around the door, capped by a Classical cornice and stone lion statue.

Phone service began in La Crosse in 1878 and the Bell system affiliated Wisconsin Telephone Company began service in the area in the 1880s. By 1919 the Wisconsin Telephone Company merged with the local La Crosse Telephone Company and sold all of its local assets. Classically trained Milwaukee based architect Herman J Esser created the original design for the building in 1900 that was modified during construction by local architect Hugo Schick in 1901. Building contractor was Joseph Schwalbe and Son. When Security Savings Bank acquired the building in 1920, local architect Otto Merman re-designed the entries in a complementary Neo-Classical style. In recent years, this building has been the home of River Architects. The Wisconsin Telephone Building was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Site 12: Park Store-Doerflinger Building
400 Main St.
Built in 1903

As “modern” in appearance today as it was when it was built over 100 years ago, the three-and-a-half story dark brown brick Doerflinger Building is of pivotal importance to the vitality and architectural integrity of the downtown business district. With its rows of tall windows, symmetrical façade and classically ornamented projecting cornice, this building is the finest example of the Chicago Commercial style in the city. The development of modern building technology, first developed in Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871, allowed the interior steel frame to support the weight of the structure and freed up the exterior walls for large window areas. The minimalist façade is accented by modillions and dentils below the cornice and a finely detailed egg and dart molding around the large window bays on the second and third floors. The massive double hung windows with a larger central opening flanked by two smaller openings defines the Chicago style window that became widely used in Early Modern commercial architecture. The triple windows in the upper half-story repeat the tripartite motif. Although somewhat altered over the years, the ground level with large plate glass windows, rows of awnings and canopied entry are true to the original appearance of the Doerflinger Store. Local architects Hugo Schick and his second partner Andrew Roth designed this local landmark building.

William Doerflinger (1857-1926) opened a “dry-goods” store on South Fourth Street in 1893. In 1897 he built the towering late Victorian commercial style Park Store building at 400 Main. In 1903, this building burned and the current building, originally known as the Park Store, was erected on the same site. For three-quarters of a century the Doerflinger Store was a downtown magnet and the largest retail store in the downtown area. The Doerflinger Store closed in the 1980s as retailers fled to the malls. Many La Crosse residents remember shopping at “The Doerflinger” and enjoying a sandwich and beverage in the “tea room” on the first floor mezzanine. Currently the Doerflinger is being redeveloped for specialty retail on the first floor and high-tech commercial tenants and condos on the upper floors. The Doerflinger sat vacant for many years, but is now consider a downtown success story.

Site 13: Alexander McMillan Building-State Bank Building
401 Main St.
Built in 1886

This five-story Romanesque Revival building has a massive, uniform limestone façade and a commanding presence. The large round arches repeated in windows and door openings, and corner turrets or battlements are also hallmarks of this style. The revival of the medieval Romanesque style began in the 1840s in America, and was interpreted and popularized by noted American architect Henry Hobson Richardson in the 1880s. The McMillan Building is an excellent local example of Richardsonian Romanesque style. The street façade, which features a massive round arched entry with supporting columns on the Main Street side, was restored to its original appearance in the 1990s after major alterations forty years earlier.

Alexander D. McMillan (1925-1901), son of Scots immigrant Duncan McMillan (1783-1861), arrived in La Crosse in 1854 looking for opportunities in the lumber trade. He was the president of the Black River Logging Company and prominent in financial and civic affairs in the city. He served as mayor of La Crosse in 1871 and was elected to the State Legislature in 1872. His brother, Duncan D. McMillan (1837-1908) was president of the State Bank of La Crosse which eventually moved into this building after first occupying the earlier State Bank Building one-half block to the west on Main Street (see 311 Main Street).

The McMillans were a prominent family of enormous wealth and influence in the formative years of the city. Duncan D. McMillan also began a lumber and wheat company that prospered for nearly a half century in La Crosse. His son, John H MacMillan (1869-1944) (spelling changed by John in the late 1890s) married Edna Cargill (1871-1963) daughter of commodity baron W. W. Cargill, and moved the company to Minneapolis in the first decade of the 20th century. The MacMillan/Cargill family still controls Cargill, Inc. the largest privately owned company in the world. This powerful multi-national corporation began with the MacMillan and Cargill families in La Crosse but no longer has any ties to the city.

Site 14: Newburg Building- The Studio
413-421 Main St.
Built in 1917

Four stories tall and with symmetrically placed windows and ornament, this excellent example of Chicago Commercial style has the distinctive cream-colored raised terra cotta decorations and contrasting dark brown brick façade typical of this style. Wide, protruding brick pilasters divide the façade into four large bays that are further divided into eight smaller bays. The stylized oval and tulip shaped decorative tiles above and below the fourth story are Sullivanesque details found in other Early Modern commercial buildings from this early 20th century period. The cream brick projecting parapet is not original. The Newburg Building is a fire-proof building with concrete floors, roof and twelve inch interior brick curtain walls and tile partitions. Design by local architects Parkinson and Dockendorff.

Site 15: John Refuss Building- Wedding Tree
414-418 Main St.
Built in 1894

A late Victorian eclectic mix of styles are seen in this three-story commercial building that began as a dry goods store. Most prominent are the two-story oriel windows and multi-textured brick façade reflective of the Queen Anne style. Round arched windows in the central bay indicated some Romanesque Revival influence. Pilasters, brackets, dentiling as well as a projecting metal cornice are additional neo-Classical decorative elements. Other than the removal of the round finials on the central parapet, the exterior retains much of its architectural integrity. Street level façade and foundation have been altered but are consistent with the overall historic appearance. Note the date block in the central bay between the second and third floors and the name block along the top of the projecting central parapet. The Rehfluss Building was designed by local architects Hugo Schick and Gutav Stolze.

German immigrant Frederick Rehfluss came to La Crosse in 1856 and opened a butcher shop on this site in 1866. In 1894 his son, John Rehfluss, moved the butcher shop to Fifth Street (now Avenue), added on to the existing building and opened a dry goods store here. For many years this building housed a number of discount stores, including the S. S. Kresge Company.

Site 16: E. R. Barron Building-City Square
426-430 Main St.
Built in 1891

Like many large commercial buildings of the late Victorian era the three-story red brick Barron Building displays a number of stylistic influences. The round-arched windows on the third story and below the date block on the upper west end of the building below the projecting gable show the Romanesque Revival influence. Queen Anne elements include the restored two-story oriel window, asymmetrical mass and multi-textured brick surface. Decorative brickwork includes corbels, pilasters, dentils and beltcourses. The pedimented entry on the west end with a gable-capped round arch adds a neo-Classical element to the north façade. The pyramidal roof on the north-east corner has been removed, altering the distinctive architectural character of the building. The following local firms are credited with contributions to the Barron Building: Schick & Stolze, Architects; Davis, Sorenson and Company, Contractor; David Wallace and Sons, Brick Masons.

East Coast Yankees E. R. Barron and C. H. Barron opened the original Barron Dry Goods store in McGregor, Iowa. In 1866, E. R. Barron and J. T. Van Valkenburg opened a dry goods store in the McMillan Building one block to the west. The Barron and Van Valenburg Dry Goods Store moved from that location to the new building named for E. R. Barron in 1891. (Note the name block in the center of the north façade just below the decorative cornice. Also note the insignia for the Masonic Order in the decorative gable end just to the right of the name block) For many years this building housed the Herberger's department store. Currently, there are a variety of retail and service tenants. The Barron Building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Site 17: Hoeschler Building – Scenic Center
115-117 5th Ave. South
Built in 1930

The La Crosse Theater building at this address was purchased by real estate developer and self-style city booster, Dr Frank Hoeschler (1875-1969) in 1929 and completely remodeled into one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in downtown La Crosse. Architects Parkinson and Dockendorff and contractor Joseph Schwalbe and Son were hired by Hoeschler for the project. The five-story fine-grained Bedford cut-limestone façade is separated into five bays vertically by abstracted pilasters or piers and the four upper floors are divided horizontally by spandrels ornamented by multi-colored ceramic and metallic tile mosaic panels. The façade is capped by a parapet with geometric, zig-zag detailing. The six original wrought iron flood lamps are positioned at the base of the vertical piers. Although some elements of the ground floor have been altered, the original recessed entry and display windows remain.

Frank Hoeschler previously built or remodeled two other buildings along Fifth Avenue for Montgomery Wards (112 South Fifth) in 1927 and Sears and Roebuck (207 South Fifth) in 1928. His visionary dream of a series of national chains positioned along the same thoroughfare anticipated the modern shopping mall of the late 20th century. Hoeschler continued the expansion of his retail empire with the addition of J. C. Penney in this arrestingly “modern”

five-story retail/office building in 1930. J. C. Penney moved out to the suburban mall in the 1980s and the building has been the home to several retail shops and restaurants in recent years. The upper levels continue to be leased as commercial offices.

Site 18: Hollywood Theater
123 5rd Ave. South
Built in 1936

Dr. Frank Hoeschler saw the need to provide entertainment for the shoppers attracted to his retail chain stores. He hired noted Minneapolis-based architects Liebenberg and Kaplan to design this movie theater building in the Art Deco style that was very popular in the 1930s. The original 42-foot illuminated tower and large wrap-around marquee were removed after World War II. The interior was remodeled for wide-screen pictures in 1953 and the main floor and balcony have seating for nearly 1000 people. The theater has been closed for many years and its future is uncertain.

Site 19: Exchange Building
201-205 5rd Ave. South
Built in 1940

This massive six-story smooth concrete office building is the best example of Art Moderne architecture in the city. Built by Frank Hoeschler on the site of the former La Crosse Tribune building, the Exchange Building features horizontal bands of aluminum clad windows, a distinctive curvilinear corner and a geometrically decorated entry surmounted by the building name. This imposing landmark building was designed by J. Mandor Matson of Racine, Wisconsin, in a style that was very popular in avant-garde architectural circles in the late 1930s. At the time it was built, it was the largest office building in downtown La Crosse.

The lobby has a highly ornamental barrel vault ceiling and for years featured two, six feet square photographs, one of Grandad Bluff and the other of Cliffwood Bluff. The interior featured the most up to date heating and cooling systems and the eleven foot tall basement was designed for expanded retail use by the adjacent Sears store. Dr. Hoeschler added a personal touch by incorporating the “Hoeschler Bull” motif on the flag-pole, inside the elevators and on the rooftop elevator housing. The poured concrete elevator housing also features Frank Hoeschler’s favorite motto, “Forward La Crosse”.

Site 20: O. J. Oyen Building-Monet’s Flowers
507-508 Main St.
Built in 1912

The three-story brick Oyen Building exhibits a number of stylistic elements that reflect the influence of the Chicago Commercial style and Arts and Crafts ornamentation. Built by Odin Oyen as a studio and office for his interior arts business the design of the building is a collaboration of Oyen and noted local architect Percy Dwight Bentley. The street level façade is cut limestone with a large arched entry and window opening and name block below a shallow projecting cornice providing a visual separation from the dark brown brick façade above. Immediately above the first story cornice is a large recessed porch-like opening with abstracted classical columns, a low metal balustrade outlined by a thin glazed tile border and brick soldier course. The recessed series of four French doors open into the studio space on the second floor providing natural light and ventilation. Illumination for the third floor is provided by a series of five leaded glass window divided by wooden mullions. Centrally placed under the windows is a highly ornamented Sullivanesque carved limestone cartouche. Above the windows is a Mediterranean inspired bracketed glazed tile pent roof covering three decorative panels with diamond-shaped tile insets. The parapet wall has a stepped limestone cap. Contractor for the Oyen Building was Peter Nelson and Son.

Percy Dwight Bentley (1885-1968) the son of wealthy local banker E. E. Bentley was educated at Ohio Wesleyan University. He studied architecture at the Armour Institute in Chicago in the first decade of the 20th century where he was heavily influenced by Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and numerous other Chicago architects who were developing a new paradigm in architecture. Bentley returned to La Crosse and designed over a dozen Prairie Style homes in La Crosse in the years 1913-1918. Bentley left La Crosse after 1918 and continued his architectural practice in the Twin Cities and later on in Oregon. Bentley’s chief draftsman, Otto Merman (1890-1935), continued to work in La Crosse and designed numerous residential, commercial and public buildings in the region. The Odin Oyen Building is the only remaining commercial building in La Crosse designed by Percy Dwight Bentley.

Odin J. Oyen (1865-1926) was born in Trondjhem, Norway, but spent his formative years in Madison, Wisconsin. He went on to study interior decorative arts at the Art Institute of Chicago. Oyen came to La Crosse and established his interior decorating studio in the city in 1888. The Odin Oyen Company hired several of the best European trained artists and was widely known throughout the Midwest their work for churches, courthouses and residences. His son Leighton continued the business after his father’s death until closing in 1931.

Site 21: H. Berger & Stireman Building-Scott Joseph Men’s Wear

500-506 Main St.
Built in 1886

Similar in many ways to the E R Barron Building and the John Rehfuss Building in the 400 block of Main Street, the three-story red brick Berger Building is an earlier example of a late Victorian commercial building with blend of Romanesque, Queen Anne, and Neo-Classical elements. Arched windows with stone voussiors and thick limestone beltcourse reflect the Romanesque Revival. The projecting sunburst gable, bracketed cornice, textured brickwork and multi-colored upper level are all Queen Anne elements. Note the name and date block at the top of the central bay. The street level modern alterations reflect the historic character of the upper floors. Built at the same time and displaying the same design and ornamentation the section of the Berger Building at 500-502 Main Street has been completely altered and retains minimal architectural integrity.

Early uses of the Berger Building included a mix of retail and service businesses. Upper floors were used by a number service organizations and clubs. An upper suite of 500-502 Main Street was the dentist's office of Dr Frank Hoeschler and Hoeschler's Drug Store occupied the street level.

Site 22: Tillman Brothers Furniture Building – Leithold's Music Store
116-118 4th St. South
Built in 1889

Designed by Stolze and Schick, the Tillman Brothers' towering five-story building is a significant brick interpretation of the Romanesque Revival style. It features three massive round arches, a motif that is repeated in the nine-arched clerestory window arcade and arched corbel table in the cornice. Cast iron pilasters, contrasting painted brick highlights and an oriel window with pressed metal trim highlight the second story.

William and Fred Tillman began furniture making in La Crosse in 1859 and expanded into coffin building and undertaking in 1870s. They moved their factory and retail store to the Fourth Street location in 1889. The Tillmans operated in this location until 1962 when the building was purchased by Leithold Music. The original first floor open retail salesroom remains mostly intact.

Site 23: Union Saloon – Bodega
120-122 4rd St. South
Built in 1876, 1883

Built originally as three separate adjacent structures housing a corner grocery and a saloon, the Bodega opened as a lunch club and saloon in 1926. The two-story vernacular brick structure has a mostly plain façade ornamented by molded brick cornice, brick dentilling and tall, narrow segmental arched windows. The first floor plate glass windows and transom window openings likely date from the conversion to a lunch room in the 1920s. Odin Oyen is credited with interior design work in the building in 1897.

The Bodega building has maintained a continuity of use and architectural character for over 80 years and is recognized as a downtown landmark business. The Bodega has operated as a tavern and micro-brewery in this location for the last several years.

Site 24: Doerre Building – Fayze's Restaurant
135-201 4rd St. South
Built in 1884, 1890, 1894

The Doerre Building (135 S. 4th) and the Doerre Block (201 S. 4th) are adjacent buildings that were built by the same developer over a ten year period from 1884-1894. The Late Victorian facades reflect an eclectic blend of the Italianate style in the bracketed projecting cornice, Romanesque Revival in the round arched windows and Queen Anne in the oriel window and decorative multi-textured brick-work. This three-story polychromatic brick building has an abbreviated fourth floor in the south section with decorative drops that separate the narrow central bay from the two broader flanking bays.

From 1907 until 1970 these two buildings housed the Tausche Hardware Company, a retail and wholesale hardware merchant. In recent years the building has been the home of the popular Fayze's Restaurant, originally operated by descendants of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants who came to La Crosse in the early 20th century. The former owner's penthouse apartment is partially visible atop the roof of 201 S. 4th.

Site 25: Gund Building-Jules Coffee House
327 Pearl St.
Built in 1885

This three-story brick vernacular commercial building with Queen Anne architectural elements is formerly a “sample room” for the Gund Brewery and has been an owner operated coffee house and popular gathering place in downtown for over a decade. The most distinctive architectural element is the two-story projecting oriel window with swag and rosette detailing. The bracketed metal projecting cornice is topped by a classical triangular pediment with the Gund name on the recessed panel. Decorative brickwork includes a pair of corbelled pilasters flanking the oriel window and recessed brick ornamentation. Cut limestone window lintels and sills add to the late Victorian appearance. Street level entry has been altered but is consistent with the time period.

Jules Coffee House is positioned between the Bodega Brew Pub to the east and Pearl Street Books to the west creating an attractive downtown ambiance seen in many cities that have successfully revitalized their historic commercial districts.

Site 26: Adam Kroner Hardware Store-Kroner Hardware
319-321 Pearl St.
Built in 1884

This three-story painted brick vernacular commercial building is significant for the continuity of use as a surviving hardware store owned and operated by the same family for over 100 years. The mostly plain brick façade has tall narrow windows with slightly pedimented second story window lintels with an incised floral design. Glass block windows alter the original window openings on the third story. The façade is capped by a bracketed metal projecting cornice typical of late Victorian commercial buildings. The façade of the street level was altered and “modernized” perhaps in the 1940s with black and white glass panels with a row of dentils across the top. The lettering of the store name and horizontal black highlights display an Art Deco motif. The interior of the Kroner Hardware store is unaltered and evokes a nostalgic feel of a “mom and pop” hardware store. The store is still owned and operated by Kroner family members.

Site 27: John Walters Building-Casino Bar
304 Pearl St.
Built in 1878

A dramatic and architecturally significant example of changing styles and tastes displayed in one building, the John Walter Building has been consistently a tavern since it opened as a “sample room” for John Walter. The tall, narrow windows with arched, keystone hood moldings and corbelled cornices at the top of the first and second stories are evidence of the Commercial Italianate style. Date and name block are positioned in the central bay of the projecting parapet.

After the end of Prohibition in 1933 this business reopened as the Casino Bar with a complete Art Moderne re-make of the street level exterior and interior of the tavern. The distinctive glazed black glass first story façade with contrasting streamlined aluminum band and aqua-colored name panels and horizontal detailing present a stark stylistic contrast to the late 19th century upper story. Glass block in the tavern window and port-hole windows in the doors are 1930s decorative elements as well. The 1930s interior Art Deco remodeling is evident in the geometrically curved booths, futuristic neon lights and multi-hued geometric bar canopy. The 1930s illuminated projecting sign touts “Lousy Service.” The Casino Bar has been a favorite hangout for downtown tavern patrons looking for an alternative to the “college bar” scene that predominates in the vicinity.

Site 28: John Voegle Building-Cheddarheads/TJ’s Art and Gifts
211-215 Pearl St.
Built in 1866, 1868, 1874

The John Voegle Building located on the north side of Pearl Street between Second and Third streets is a significant architectural and historical representative of the city’s past as well an excellent example of the role of historic preservation in heritage tourism and downtown revitalization. Built in 1866 at 215 Pearl St, expanded to 213 Pearl St in 1868 and to 211 Pearl Street in 1874; the Voegle Building is the oldest identifiable brick commercial building in the La Crosse Commercial Historic District (National Register of Historic Places 1994). Built after the end of the Civil War, this vernacular style two-story brick building represents an early transition from “boom-town” wood frame construction to more fire-resistant brick-clad exteriors.

John Voegle (1836-1897) was born in Schwaben, Bavaria, a district in Germany that was the original home of many German-born immigrants to La Crosse. He arrived in La Crosse in 1856 and was a lead salesman for the John Paul Lumber Company for 33 years. In addition to his business ventures on Pearl Street, he built the North Side Brewery that he operated jointly with his brother. Built originally as a grocery store in 1866, Voegle added two nearly identically sized and ornamented additions to the west of 215 Pearl Street over the next several years. The storefronts at 213-215 Pearl Street were more often eating and/or drinking establishments operated by a number of different owners over the following 100 plus years. In the early 1920s the listing in the city directory for 213-215 Pearl Street, along with dozens of other beverage retailers in the city, changes abruptly from saloon to “soft drink” sales and then back to “tavern” in the 1930s. The 200 Block of Pearl Street maintained a reputation as a rather “rough” area for the

next several decades until the heritage tourism opportunities of the 1980s dramatically changed the character of Pearl Street.

Businessman and historic preservation visionary T. J. Peterslie purchased the first of his buildings at 211-215 Pearl Street in the late 1970s. The urban renewal initiative for downtown La Crosse began in the early 1970s with the razing of most of the late 19th commercial buildings. From the perspective of the early 21st century this may be perceived as a loss for historic preservation, but what was gained was the opening of the La Crosse Center and the Radisson Hotel. This development became a magnet for tourism in La Crosse and provided an opportunity for commercial re-development in the economically challenged downtown district. The 200 Block of Pearl Street, now known as “Pearl Street West”, became the center of this renewal with an attractive and tourist-friendly mix of specialty shops and dining establishments. Historic Downtown La Crosse is now a nationally-recognized regional success story in linking historic preservation to economic revitalization. T. J. Peterslie and others on Pearl Street have led the way for downtown La Crosse and are to be heartily congratulated for their efforts.

Site 29: George Zeisler Building-Satori Arts
201 Pearl St.
Built in 1886

This two-story brick store and residence shows a mix of late 19th century stylistic influences but is most significant as a very well preserved and maintained vernacular commercial building. Tall narrow windows and recessed corbelled bays and the low decorative brick parapet wall are all Italianate elements. The distinctive “rising sun” ornament in the pediments on the south and west and the unusual two-color decorative belt course on the first and second story show the Queen Anne influence of the late 1880s. The windows, cast iron columns, decorated transom panels and awning are all period appropriate. (Note the sandblasting evidence on the west brick wall.) This vernacular building is the work of local contractors Raymond Kiensle (brick mason) and Royal Reynolds (general contractor).

The Zeisler Brewery was established in La Crosse by George Zeisler in 1857; one of over a dozen breweries operated by mostly German-American brewers in La Crosse in the late 19th century. The Ziesler Building was a “sample room” for beverages produced by the brewery of the same name. In recent years the building has been the retail storefront for Satori Arts and the home of the John Satory family. The Zeisler Building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

Site 30: Pamperin Tobacco Company – Ambiance
113 2nd St. South
Built in 1879

Sensitive restoration is evident in this two-story brick Late Victorian Commercial property that is one of the surviving buildings along the historic La Crosse waterfront. The highly ornate sheet metal cornice includes a classical central triangular pediment with modillions and dentiling along the broad intact entablature. Corner brick pilasters and dentiled corbelling above and below surround the second story façade. Five evenly placed tall, narrow double-hung windows with matching highly decorative window hoods show an Italianate influence. A bronze plaque identifying the building as the “Pamperin Cigar Company” is located in the middle of the second story façade. The street level has the original recessed entry, cast iron columns and copper apron. The facade has been updated with new windows and canvas awning that are period appropriate.

Southwestern Wisconsin, and particularly Vernon County, had an important tobacco-raising economy starting in the mid-19th century that lasted into the late 20th century. German immigrant John Pamperin started his cigar-making factory in 1865 using locally grown and imported tobacco and was later joined in the business by E Wiggenhorn. The Pamperin and Wiggenhorn Tobacco Company had several earlier locations in downtown La Crosse before moving into the 2nd street location in the early 20th century. In 1942, the Pamperin Cigar Company ceased cigar making, but continued making tobacco blends in this location into the 1970s. The building was first restored in 1975 and is now adaptively re-used as a specialty gift shop below and luxury owner-occupied apartment above. The Pamperin Cigar Company building is a La Crosse City Landmark property.

