

FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

I. NAME

Historic: Schlitz Tavern

Common Name: Humboldt Gardens

II. LOCATION

2249 N. Humboldt Avenue, a.k.a. 1025 E. North Avenue

Legal description - Tax Key No 354-0501-000-1

Charles Quentin's Subd of LOT 83 in LOTS 2 & 3 in NW ¼ 21-7-22
Block 1 LOTS 1 & 2

6TH Aldermanic District
Alderwoman Marlene Johnson-Odom

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Damian Zak
2024 N. Buffum St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212

V. YEAR BUILT:

1890

ARCHITECT: Charles Kirchhoff, Jr.

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Schlitz Tavern at 2249 N. Humboldt Avenue is located at the southwest corner of East North Avenue and North Humboldt Avenue. The building consists of a solid masonry structure of three stories at the corner to which is attached a one story brick veneered portion to the south. Both portions have flat roofs. The building is constructed up to the north lot line and south lot line and is set back from the east lot line behind a small landscaped area. At the rear or west is a small yard. Late 19th and early 20th century houses characterize the surrounding neighborhood and there is commercial development at the intersection consisting of a Jewel Osco Store, a filling station, and the site of a former filling station.

The Schlitz Tavern was built in 1890 in the Romanesque style and served as a saloon and bowling alley and rental hall and also had apartments for the proprietors. The two main elevations along Humboldt Avenue and North Avenue are articulated while the south and west elevations are simple and utilitarian in design.

In keeping with the design characteristics of the style, large semi-circular window and door openings are found on the first story and an arcade defines the third. Attention is focused at the corner that features the main entrance set within an arched opening and a prominent tower or oriel that rises two and a half stories above the entrance. Bold corbelling is used at the bowling alley portion of the building and at the tower and linear banding can be found along both major elevations. Windows on the upper stories are rectangular in form and feature transoms at the topmost floor. Tourelles project above the cornice at the bowling alley. An arched entry is located on the North Avenue elevation and is adjacent to a second archway framed in stone. A three-sided bay projects from the second story above the second archway on this north elevation. The west elevation is nearly blank with only a single window at the third story. The south elevation likewise is nearly blank with two modern windows installed at the top story. A historic fire escape is located along the North Avenue façade while a contemporary fire escape is located along the south elevation. Decorative stonework can be found at the base of the tower and the impost moldings.

Changes or alterations to the building have been minimal. The most noticeable difference from historic views is that the tower has lost its conical roof, a feature that was removed in 1942 according to permit records. Historic photos also show that tourelles and ornamental ironwork once extended above the cornice on the Humboldt and North Avenues sides of the building. The date of their removal is not known. In recent decades modern fixed windows have replaced many of the double hung sash and some widow openings have been closed in. The Humboldt Avenue entry door to the bowling alley may have been cut in sometime this century and the stoop added. A 1959 photo shows that basement windows were visible along Humboldt Avenue but have now been blocked in and are screened by landscape plantings. The original cream color brick that was locally manufactured is now hidden under a coat of cream color paint.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Schlitz Tavern at Humboldt and North is significant as one of the major corner taverns erected by the Schlitz Brewing Company in the late 19th century. Schlitz was coming into its own by the 1880's and giving the Pabst Brewing Company a run for its money by acquiring scores of corner lots and other real estate on which to build saloons and other investment properties. It symbolized the company's prosperity and the prominence of breweries in the local culture. The tavern built here was a high style affair, designed in the new Romanesque style that was the most fashionable for commercial buildings at the time. It was larger than most of the corner taverns and intended to serve not only as a place for spirits but a social center complete with a bowling alley and rental halls for special events. Its prominent location near the base of the Reservoir and across from the Milwaukee Road Humboldt yards has made it a visual landmark to this day.

The Schlitz Tavern is also significant as an outstanding work of local architect Charles Kirchhoff. Kirchhoff is known to have been the Uihleins' architect of choice. He designed saloons at 2675 North King Drive and 2414 South St. Clair Street (Three Brothers) as well as the Schlitz Palm Garden at Third and Wisconsin (razed), and the Schlitz Globe Hotel at Cass and Wisconsin (razed) and the Alhambra Theater Building at Fourth and Wisconsin (razed). Together with his partner Thomas Leslie Rose, Kirchhoff continued to design taverns for the Schlitz Brewing Company after the turn of the century and also some of the very prominent Lake Drive mansions for members of the Uihlein family. The firm of Kirchhoff and Rose survived until 1973, having produced residential, ecclesiastical, industrial and educational buildings throughout Wisconsin including the Second Ward Savings Bank (Milwaukee County Historical Society), the Empire Building (Riverside Theater Building), and the Majestic Building.

VIII. HISTORY

The Schlitz Tavern at Humboldt and North was built in Charles Quentin's Subdivision of Lot 83, a subdivision platted in 1857. The property changed hands only a few times before being acquired by the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company on May 24, 1884. Characteristic of the time period, Schlitz, like its competitors, did not actually build on the site right away but held onto the property to await the right time for development. It was common for the various breweries, particularly Pabst and Schlitz and to a lesser degree Miller and Blatz and Jung, to accumulate real estate in the frenzy for choice corner lots. A Milwaukee Sentinel article from April 26, 1885 indicated that the three major breweries (Schlitz, Best later known as Pabst, and Blatz), had purchased around 200 corner lots in the past year alone. The article went on to say that the fact "that there should be room for a saloon for every 130 inhabitants (including men, women and children), has given the city the name of being the saloonkeeper's paradise." The article continued it "is hardly possible, however, that all of these saloons could be profitably continued were it not for the backing of the brewers. The brewers have invested an enormous aggregate of capital in the business of brewing beer, and have a vital interest in having the demand for beer kept up. Within the past two years the export trade has been affected by a more active competition, and in order to utilize the full strength of their productive facilities, local brewers have seen the need of maintaining the home trade."

Rather than merely supplying stock and fixtures to saloonkeepers who might otherwise prove untrustworthy or unbusinesslike, the breweries took it upon themselves to erect their own tavern buildings with the result that "[I]t secures the erection of better buildings in place of the wretched structures occupied by the proprietors of low groceries, and better order will be maintained." All this development was viewed with skepticism by the paper which commented that saloon sites were being acquired even in the better residence portions of the city and "every property owner knows that they do not enhance the value of his adjoining property, and although he may be a good patron of the saloon, he does not care to have it for his next door neighbor."

Development along Humboldt Avenue had progressed by the mid-1880's to include summer getaway houses for the well to do north of North Avenue. The large Humboldt yards shops of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul (Milwaukee Road) Railway had been erected at the southeast corner of North and Humboldt Avenues in 1865 for the building and repair of railroad cars and employed 150 men. On the west side of Humboldt Avenue across from the yards small frame houses went up along with a store and saloon.

Schlitz's decision to construct a monumental building at Humboldt and North coincided with the rapid development that began occurring north of North Avenue as the large estates began to make way for the influx of mostly Polish and some German immigrants who came to work at the various factories then being established along the Milwaukee River. The permit for the new three story structure was taken out in April of 1890 and included not only a tavern area but a bowling alley and rental hall in addition to living quarters for the proprietor. Charles Kirchhoff was chosen to design the building having already designed churches and other commercial buildings throughout the city. By this time he had also designed the Globe Hotel among other buildings for the Schlitz Brewing Company and would continue to have numerous commissions from the firm in the future. Although Schlitz at this time lagged behind the giant Pabst Brewing Company in size and volume it challenged its competitor in the amount of real estate investments made in the city and out of state that included saloons and hotels. Whether Schlitz erected fewer but larger and more impressive neighborhood saloons than Pabst is a matter for further research. Many of the large Pabst projects have been demolished while more Schlitz buildings are extant for study.

The new tavern building at Humboldt and North would remain in the ownership of the brewery or members of the Uihlein family for 51 years. The building was leased to a succession of proprietors:
Julius Schmechel (1891-1892)

Fred Zethner	(1893-1894)
Charles H. Winkler	(1895-1901)
Louis Salzman	(1902-1904)
Michael S. Schulist	(1905-1929)
Frank Deuster	(1930)

During Prohibition Schlitz, like other breweries, was forced to dissolve its corporation. The real estate holdings were transferred to Robert A. Uihlein in April of 1923. The same holdings were transferred to the Schlitz Realty Corporation in January, 1928. After Prohibition ended the property at Humboldt and North was sold off to Benjamin (Bronislaw) Jakubiak on December 11, 1935. Jakubiak had been leasing the premises as a soft drink parlor since 1931. A city building survey shows that the front portion of the bowling alley had been converted to a dance hall by 1934 and the rear portion was just unused space. Jakubiak would own the building until his death on May 16, 1951. Jakubiak was responsible for the removal of the tower's conical roof and maybe the tourelles on the Humboldt and North Avenues elevations in 1942. It was during his occupancy of the building that city directories began listing the premises as Humboldt Gardens although it might have been known by that name earlier. Jakubiak's widow Mary would lease the building to Steve Deja in 1952 and then John and Leo Sadowski in 1953-1954. The tavern was known briefly as John and Leo's Tavern and after Leo left for other employment the place was run by Leo Sadowski through 1962. During these first 80 years, the proprietors mostly lived in the second floor apartment. The Jakubiaks had a second tavern at 201 W. Mitchell Street where they lived some of the time before settling in at Humboldt Gardens. A son-in-law or brother-in-law Stanley Kalawa and his wife Helen also lived on the premises with the Jakubiaks. Building permit records do not indicate that there were additional apartments in the building.

The building has subsequently experienced numerous ups and downs in its history. The building sat vacant from 1963 through 1969 during which time members of the Jakubiak family sold the building on land contract to George Stephens in 1967. Stephens transferred his interest to Thomas Holman in 1971. Holman ran the Mint Lounge out of the building from 1970 to 1971. Holman was a somewhat notorious figure according to permit records and had a long prosecution record with the Department of Building Inspection over negligence to his multitude of properties. Chester L. Hopper became the next proprietor of the Mint Lounge from 1972 to 1973. Holman continued to own the property until 1976 when he sold it on land contract to Damian Zak. Zak received the deed to the property in 1983. During Zak's ownership the building was operated by Ed C. Reynolds from 1974 to 1975 and was then known as Zak's North Avenue from 1976 to 1985. It was a popular venue for rock bands and live entertainment. The building has been subsequently known as The Spruce Goose (1986), Kilroy's Tavern (Mark Emanuelson, 1987-1990) and lastly the Hot Spot Tavern (1992). The tavern portion of the building has been vacant since that time and the second story has housed offices for Mr. Zak as well as Body Waves Beauty Salon and Gentle Touch Electrolysis.

As it has in the past, the Schlitz Tavern at Humboldt and North occupies a prime corner at a bustling intersection. The Humboldt yards that gave way to numerous building material suppliers by the 1920's has now been developed with a new Jewel-Osco complex. The small frame tavern at the north west corner of the intersection was replaced in the 1920's with a filling station that is now in its second or third generation building. The fabulous Orth mansion that graced the northeast corner was razed for a Clark filling station in the 1960's. This filling station has now been razed also and the corner remains vacant. The Schlitz Tavern thus is the only surviving 19th century structure to grace the intersection. Given the elevation of the building, it is one of the visual landmarks in the vista west along North Avenue to the Reservoir.

The Architect

Charles Kirchoff (July 22, 1856-July, 1915) was born in Milwaukee of immigrant parents who had

come to Milwaukee from Wurtemberg, Germany in 1853. His father Charles Sr. was a carpenter contractor and cabinetmaker by trade so the young Charles was familiar with the building trades from an early age. Charles Jr. attended public school and the prestigious German-English Academy before learning the trades of carpenter and mason himself. He went east to study architecture in Boston and New York City and returned to Milwaukee to practice. His first job was with Henry Messmer with whom he built St. Anthony's Church on Mitchell Street and St. Michael's Church on 24th Street. Kirchhoff left Messmer to work on his own in 1885 and by 1892 had designed a number of churches, commercial blocks, the Globe Hotel for Schlitz, a power house for the Milwaukee Light and Power Company as well as eight other buildings for Schlitz, a number for the Miller Brewing and Oberman Brewing Companies and numerous hotels throughout Wisconsin and the midwest. Later commissions for the Schlitz Brewing Company included the famous Palm Garden adjacent to the Schlitz Hotel at the corner of Third and Wisconsin and the Alhambra Theater Building at the northeast corner of Fourth and Wisconsin, the site of the blue Reuss Federal Building today.

Kirchhoff took on a partner, Thomas L. Rose in 1897 and the two began an architectural dynasty that survived until 1973. Some of their projects included the Second Ward Savings Bank (now the Milwaukee County Historical Society Center), the Empire Building (Riverside Theater), the Orpheum Theater, the Phoenix Knitting Company Building #3 in the Historic Third Ward, the Majestic Building and the Joseph Uihlein mansion at 3318 N. Lake Drive. The firm documents that the partners drew plans for about 200 taverns among their first 1,000 commissions. Kirchhoff died in 1915 but his partner and his son continued the business. In its later years the firm was known for its drive-in theaters, university buildings, the State Office Building downtown, the Police Administration Building downtown and numerous churches. By 1969 the firm had logged in over 2,829 projects over the course of its career.

Kirchhoff was one of the leading architects of late 19th and early 20th centuries Milwaukee. The Schlitz Tavern at Humboldt and North is a fine and mature example of Kirchhoff's use of the Romanesque style, reminiscent of his slightly earlier Globe Hotel design but scaled down to the neighborhood for which it was designed. Given the demolition of all of his first known independent commissions in Milwaukee, the Schlitz Tavern appears to be the earliest surviving building designed in the city by Kirchhoff and shows him to be a masterful architect.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Schlitz Tavern at 2249 North Humboldt Avenue (a.k.a. 1025 E. North Avenue) be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criterion e-1, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-1. Its exemplification of the development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.
- e-5. Its embodiment of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.
- e-6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, interior designer, craftsman or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.
- e-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city of Milwaukee.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. ROOFS

Retain the roof shape. Skylights or dormers are discouraged but may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street or public right of way. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roofing as closely as possible. The conical roof on the tower may be restored to its original appearance.

B. MATERIALS

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural terra cotta or stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting limestone, terra cotta, or cream brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that do not duplicate the appearance of the original materials. Covering wood trim with aluminum or vinyl is not permitted.

C. WINDOWS AND DOORS

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design and material of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block. Avoid using modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. Vinyl or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block basement windows are not permitted, except on elevations where they will not be visible from the street.
3. Steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.

D. TRIM AND ORNAMENTATION

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance.

E. ADDITIONS

No additions will be permitted on the east (Humboldt Avenue) and the north (North Avenue) elevations, as this would destroy the character of the building. Any other addition requires the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color, and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right of way.

F. SIGNS/EXTERIOR LIGHTING

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light with the historic and architectural character of the building. Plastic internally illuminated box signs are not permitted.

G. SITE FEATURES

New plant materials, paving, fencing, or accessory structures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building if visible from the public right of way.

H. GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

It is important that new construction be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the structure.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the building. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the building from the street as a freestanding structure.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the commercial building.

3. Form

The massing of the new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the building as a freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and receded from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in close proximity to it.

4. Materials

The building materials, which are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the building, should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on the building. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

I. GUIDELINES FOR DEMOLITION

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.