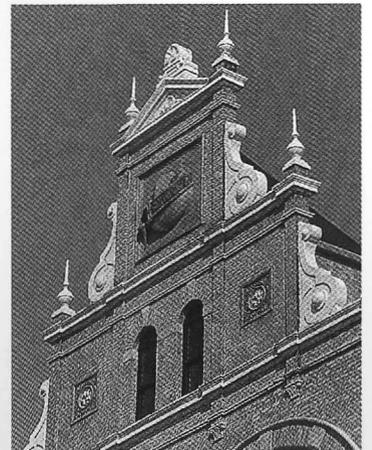


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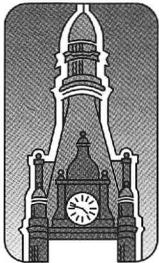
# Milwaukee

## Ethnic Commercial and Public Buildings Tour



*The rich heritage of  
immigrant architecture*

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The examples of ethnic architecture presented in this booklet were chosen for their outstanding architectural character and craftsmanship and were meant to give a general overview of Milwaukee's distinctive ethnic commercial building stock. In addition to these, many other fine examples can be found throughout the city.

Visitors to Milwaukee will find this guide a good introduction to some of Milwaukee's most interesting buildings, while local residents might be prompted to take a fresh look at some of the city's familiar and not so familiar landmarks. A brief word of caution is in order. Like all cities, Milwaukee has some neighborhoods that are in a state of social and economic transition. When viewing buildings in these areas, you are advised to exercise the same caution regarding personal safety that one should observe when entering any unfamiliar surroundings.

Unless otherwise indicated, the buildings featured are privately owned and not open to the public. We ask that the user of this booklet respect the privacy of the property owner.

# Milwaukee

## Ethnic Commercial and Public Buildings Tour

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of immigrant  
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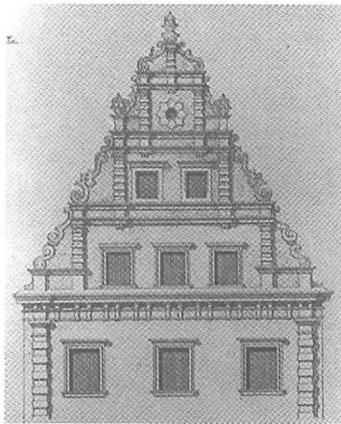
## ETHNIC COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Milwaukee is an ideal place to learn about the fascinating link between ethnicity and architectural style. Many of the city's fine, older commercial buildings reflect the rich ethnic heritage of America's immigrants. Exploring the city's collection of ethnic commercial architecture is an excellent way to experience some of Milwaukee's "Old World" character and culture.

The ethnic character of a building is usually reflected in a specific architectural style or in a prominent building feature that is strongly associated with the homeland of a particular ethnic group. On a commercial building, for example, the upper front was often embellished with architectural features from the "old country" that personalized it for its builder and for the immigrant community it was built to serve.

The hallmarks of ethnic commercial architecture can be best seen at the roof line, or in the gable, which is the triangular wall area formed by the two sloping planes of a pitched roof. These areas often feature eye-catching ethnic details that give the building a distinctive appearance to attract the attention of customers and passersby. For example, Milwaukee has a particularly fine stock of ethnic commercial buildings that feature stepped, curved or scrolled front gables. This style of commercial architecture is common in Northern Europe, where many of the city's immigrants came from, but seldom seen in America.

Many of the ethnic buildings in the city were constructed by the German immigrants who flocked to the city during the 19th century. By the 1850s, Milwaukee was already known as the "German Athens" because of its reputation as an exceptionally strong center of German culture in the New World. German style commercial buildings can be found throughout the older neighborhoods in the city.



*Shaped gables such as this one from the Breslauer area of Germany inspired the shaped gables seen on Milwaukee's ethnic buildings.*

Like the Germans, the city's large Polish immigrant community expressed its ethnic pride and architectural traditions in the designs of many small commercial buildings. Most of these structures demonstrate their ethnicity in the use of unique shaped gables. They were generally built between 80 and 90 years ago, just after the peak years of Polish immigration to this country, when established Polish merchants could finally afford to build their own distinctive buildings. Well-preserved examples of Polish ethnic commercial architecture are particularly common on the city's South Side, especially on W. Lincoln Avenue between S. 6th and S. 20th Streets. The South Side below Greenfield Avenue was historically a major center of Polish culture in Milwaukee. Years ago, a Polish language sign that read "Polish spoken here" was a familiar fixture in many South Side storefront windows. Ethnic commercial architecture is one of the most visible reminders of this nation's colorful immigrant heritage. Exploring these unique structures is an enjoyable way to learn more about Milwaukee's history and to gain a deeper appreciation for its rich cultural diversity.

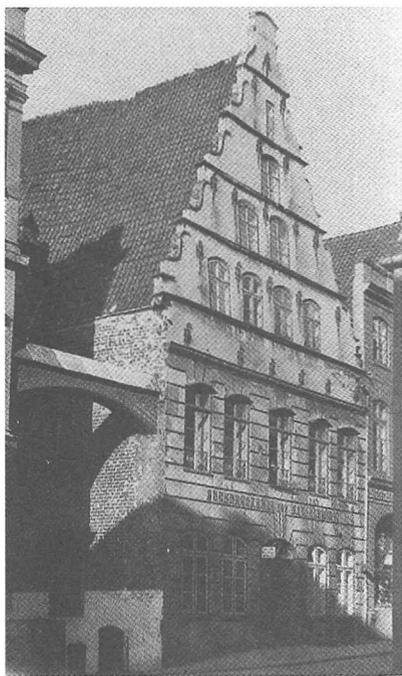
European buildings such as those below and on the next two pages served as models for Milwaukee's ethnic commercial buildings.



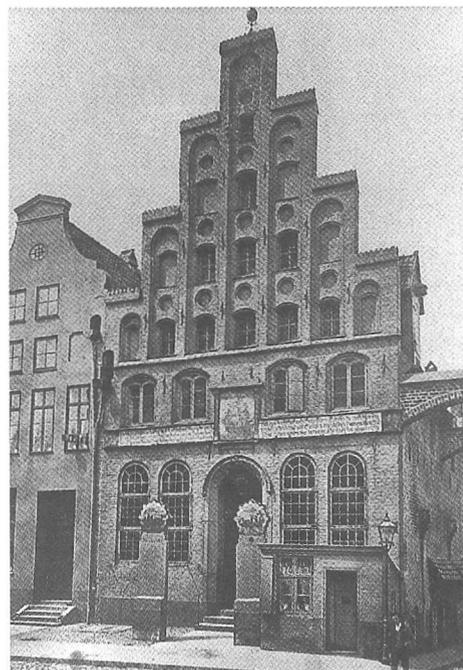
*House on Wahmstrasse, built in 1790, Lubeck, Germany*



*A 17th century house in Cochem, Germany*



*Printinghouse in Mengstrasse, Lubeck, Germany.*



*Sailors Society Hall, Breitestrasse, Lubeck, Germany, built 1535.*



*Houses on Beckergube Street, Lubeck, Germany.*

*All historic photographs courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library.*

# LOST EXAMPLES OF ETHNIC ARCHITECTURE

The following illustrations are intended to provide a more complete picture of how prevalent ethnic influenced architecture once was in Milwaukee. Its period of popularity was relatively brief, lasting only about two decades, until a shift in taste toward modernism and the anti-German sentiment that accompanied the two world wars made these unique buildings suspect in the public's eye. Many people in the mid-20th century, in fact, regarded these ethnic buildings as aesthetic eyesores representing the worst manifestation of Victorian excess. In addition, as they became more Americanized, many German-Americans developed noticeably Anglophile tastes after World War I as they left their European-inspired buildings to move to more mainstream Tudor, Mediterranean and Colonial style structures. Ironically, although they were built to last the ages, the ethnic-looking buildings were often the first to be demolished in the 1950s and 1960s. With the renewed interest in historic architecture and pride in ethnic origin, public opinion has shifted toward an appreciation of these unique, handcrafted buildings, although demolition and thoughtless remodeling are still taking their toll on our dwindling stock of these fine structures.

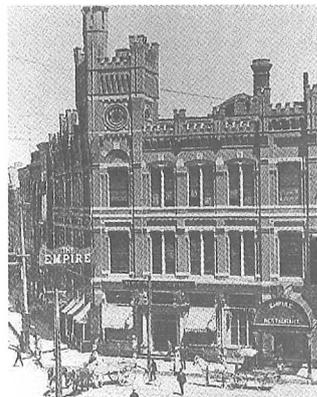


A. Meinecke Building,  
791 N. Milwaukee St.,  
built 1889, razed 1966.



Meinecke Toy Company Building,  
117-125 E. Wells St.  
Built in 1891 as depicted above but  
remodeled after a fire in 1901.

All historic photographs courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library.



Empire Building, northeast corner of  
N. Plankinton and W. Wisconsin Avenues.  
Remodeled into this form in the 1890s by  
architect Otto Strack. Razed 1927.



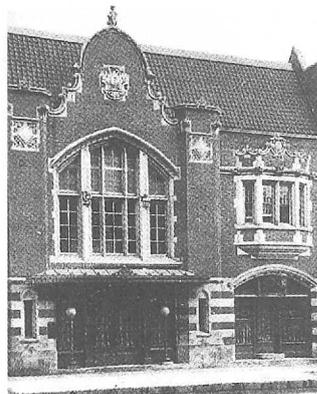
Pabst Building, 110 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Architect: Solon S. Beman, Chicago.  
Built 1892, razed 1981.



Joseph Vrzal Building,  
1310-1312 S. 16th St.  
Built c. 1905. Remodeled 1992.



August H. Burkhardt Building,  
749-751 N. 7th St.  
Built c. 1900-1901. Razed 1957.



Gargoyle Restaurant, 316 W. Wisconsin Ave.  
Architect: Kirchhoff & Rose.  
Built 1906, razed 1925.



Theodore Rogahn Building, 1024 S. 16th St.  
Architect: Chas. L. Lesser.  
Built 1907, razed 1992.

# DOWNTOWN

## Milwaukee City Hall

Year Built: 1893-1895

Architect: Henry C. Koch & Co.

200 E. Wells Street

Ethnic Origin: German



This monumental example of civic architecture is probably Milwaukee's best known symbol of its German-American heritage. The building stands on an unusual triangular site that was the location of Milwaukee's first market hall and city hall. The need for a structure big enough to accommodate all city departments under one roof was already evident by the early 1880s, but political wrangling delayed action until 1891 when an architectural competition was officially announced by the Common Council to get

designs for a new city hall. From the eleven submissions, the plans of local architect H. C. Koch & Co. were chosen. The Teutonic style winning design was considered to be the most suitable for a city known at the time as the Deutsche-Athens.

Patterned after a German "rathaus" or town hall, Koch ornamented the dormers and tower with German Renaissance style shaped gables. He also incorporated much sculptural detail, including putti or cherubs, winged griffins, and the heads of foxes or wolves to satisfy the German taste for rich carved ornament. Romanesque influence is visible in the extensive use of arches at the upper story and at the base of the 350-foot tower where carriages could once drive directly up to the front entrance. The 8-story-tall skylit atrium space inside



was an innovative and strikingly modern feature for its time. It is embellished with ornamental railings of bronze finished cast iron, a patterned mosaic-tile floor, and stencils recreated from the originals by Conrad Schmitt Studios in 1992. City Hall, which is open to the public on weekdays, is considered by many experts to be the finest German style public building in America. It is a Milwaukee Locally Designated Historic Building and is located within the Plankinton/Wells/Water Street National Register Historic District. ❖



Architect Henry C. Koch borrowed features from actual German city hall buildings for the design of Milwaukee's City Hall including the arches at the first story entrance, the tower, and the shaped gables.



Left: Bamberg Town Hall, built 1687. Right: Salthaus, Frankfurt, built early 17th century.



Left: Danzig Town Hall, built 1465; tower added in 1559-1561. Right: Leipzig Town Hall, built in the 15th-16th centuries.

All historic photographs courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library

## Pabst Theater

Year Built: 1895  
144 E. Wells Street

Architect: Otto Strack  
Ethnic Origin: German



The Pabst Theater is one of the few remaining structures in the country associated with the golden age of German language theater in America, and it is Milwaukee's sole surviving 19th century opera house. It was built in 1895 by brewing magnate Fred Pabst to replace an earlier theater on the site that had burned. It was intended to rival in splendor any theater of its size in Germany. Incredibly, it was built in less than a year to comply with Captain Pabst's orders.

Its architect, Otto Strack, was born in Roebel, Germany and had been trained in the building trades as well as architecture in Berlin and Vienna. He came to the United States in 1881 and conducted a successful architectural practice in Chicago before relocating to Milwaukee in 1888. His European training made him popular with Milwaukee's German-American businessmen, and he did considerable commercial work for the Pabst Brewing Company as well as designing houses for the Pabst family and other clients. His most impressive surviving house is the Kalvelage House, featured in another booklet in this series. Although described as being "Renaissance" in style when first built, the Pabst Theater reflects Strack's interpretation of the German Baroque and features a



mansard roof above the stage area. The orange brick, terra cotta ornament and decorative iron work were design features preferred by German clients. Of the many eye-catching details, of particular note is the terra cotta cartouche or plaque at the east end of the facade emblazoned with the letter "P," the Pabst monogram. Also interesting is the figural bust set in a shell niche at the center of the facade above the delicate iron balcony. No one knows if she depicts any particular person, and so she is simply known locally as the "Lady in the Shell." The gilded urns and a lyre that crown the parapet at the east end served as symbols of the building's theatrical use.

The Pabst Theater showcased the talents of Milwaukee's German language stock theater company. The lead roles in the productions were frequently performed by famous German actors on tour in the U.S. After World War I, German theater rapidly declined in popularity. The Pabst later presented English language drama and motion pictures. The building was acquired by the City of Milwaukee in 1961 and restored to its original magnificence by Conrad Schmitt Studios and Mark F. Pfaller and Associates in 1975-1976. The Pabst is now linked by a galleria to a new office building and hotel complex called the Milwaukee Center, built 1986-1988. A new, more spacious lobby for the Pabst, opening off the galleria, was added in 1989. Tours of the beautiful, European-style opera house interior are offered to the public on a regular basis. The Pabst Theater is a Locally Designated Historic Building and is located within the Plankinton/Wells/Water Street National Register Historic District. ♦

## Germania/Brumder Building

Year Built: 1896

Architect: Schnetzky and Liebert

135 W. Wells Street

Ethnic Origin: German



Probably no other commercial building in downtown Milwaukee exemplifies the German business presence in the city better than the Germania Building. This monumental, 8-story-tall structure was the center of immigrant George Brumder's nationwide, German-language publishing empire. Begun in 1873, the firm published books, newspapers, and magazines in the German language and also handled all of the publishing for the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod. Nineteenth century America's largest circulation German language newspaper, *Germania*, is probably the company's best known publication.

Brumder's business had already outgrown two previous buildings on Plankinton Avenue before planning for the present building began in 1892. Architect Eugene R. Liebert was selected to design the new structure. He had been trained in architecture in Germany and was a partner in the firm of Schnetzky and Liebert at the time. An early

watercolor rendering shows that Liebert was initially inspired by what was then the world's tallest office building, the 26-story New York World building, which had just been built for Joseph Pulitzer in New York City. A recession in the early 1890s postponed construction of Brumder's building, and, in the interim, the structure was scaled back to its present eight stories.

While incorporating such standard features of late 19th century commercial architecture as classical columns, triangular pediments with carved cupid figures, and an arcaded upper story, Liebert gave the building a definite German character as well. He replaced his originally intended classical central dome with four smaller copper clad domes placed at the corners of the roof. Their distinctive profile and bold finials resembled the German military headgear of the period and were soon nicknamed "Kaiser's helmets." The small orbs flanking each dome were once topped by majestic eagles. The most beloved German feature of the building was a 3-ton, 10-foot-high bronze statue of Germania that once stood above the main entrance. It was a copy of the allegorical figure of Germany on the German National Monument located on the Rhine River near Rudesheim, which had been erected in the late 19th century to commemorate the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War. Sadly, anti-German sentiment led to the statue's removal during World War I, and it was subsequently destroyed. Carved stone letters spelling out "Germania" were also removed from the building at that time, when it was renamed the Brumder Building.

The building was last used for publishing in 1927, when the printing operations were transferred to Winona, Minnesota. The Brumder family sold the building in 1946. It was handsomely restored in the early 1980s, at which time the name "Germania" was reinstalled on the exterior. The Germania Building is located within the Plankinton/Wells/Water Street National Register Historic District. Its facade is protected by a special easement granted to Historic Milwaukee Inc., a local preservation group, which ensures that its repair and maintenance are done in a manner consistent with its historic character. ❖



# EAST SIDE

## Hambach and Hellmann Meat Store

Year built: 1910

Architect: Theodore Schutz

1024 E. Brady Street

Ethnic Origin: German



During the early part of this century, the Hambach and Hellmann Meat Store was one of over 200 small butcher shops scattered throughout the city. The quality design of the Hambach and Hellmann building, which is a fine example of the German Renaissance Revival style of architecture, reflects the importance of its site as a good location for business at the turn of the century.

Like much of the city's ethnic architecture, this store was built for members of Milwaukee's burgeoning German-American community. The mason contractor, Anton Schmidt, as well as the architect and the original owners were all of German-American heritage. Standing out as it does among the surrounding American Victorian style and plain early 20th century commercial structures, the distinctive, ethnic-inspired architecture of the building served as an excellent advertisement for the business. Structures such as the Hambach and Hellmann store were a

visual link to "Old World" traditions and culture which many German-American immigrants and their descendants remembered with admiration and pride.

The street-level storefront has been greatly altered over the years, but the upper part of the building remains virtually unchanged. The ends of the finely shaped front gable have a "stepped" appearance, which is characteristic of building traditions in Germany, while the ornamental coping that edges the top of the gable is a bold Teutonic touch. The use of knife-thin mortar joints between the sienna-colored bricks is one of the building techniques favored by German builders around the turn of the century because it produced a very fine finished appearance, even though doing it was costly and required extra labor and the use of more brick than would have been the case with wider mortar joints. The unusual leaded glass in the windows on the second story is of American Prairie style design, which was very fashionable during the first two decades of this century.

During the late 19th century, Brady Street was considered to be the main street of the city's east side Polish community. At that time, most of the merchants in the area were of Polish descent, but there were also a number of German merchants such as William F. Hellmann and his partner, Frederick Hambach, Jr. The Hambach family was well known in the city's retail meat trade at the turn of the century because they operated four butcher shops around the city.

About 1918 the partnership dissolved and Hellmann continued the business on his own. Like most shopkeepers of his era, Hellmann lived in the flat above the store. In 1920 Hellmann sold his business to a Polish-American businessman, Benjamin D. Jaworski, who continued to operate the butcher shop into the 1930s. Hellmann and his wife, Adele, lived in the upper flat until the mid-1920s when they moved to the city's West Side where Hellmann worked as a meat cutter. Hellmann apparently never went back into business for himself.

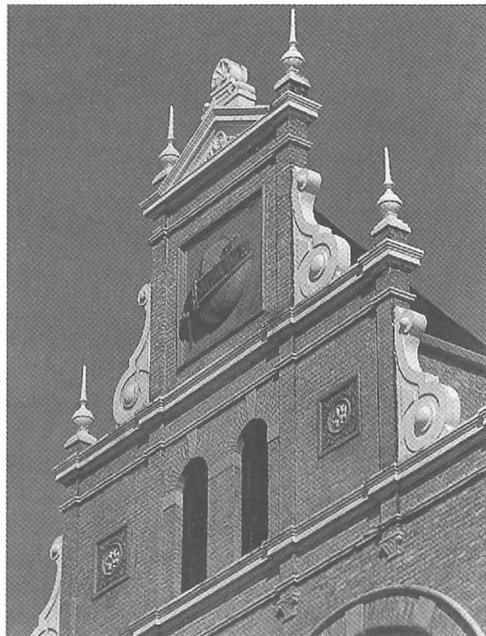
Between the late 1930s to the late 1960s, the building housed a variety of different businesses, none of which was a meat store. Since the late 1960s, however, the building has been the home of Glorioso's Market, a well-known delicatessen and butcher shop. It is again filled with the aromas of sausages, herbs, and cooking spices much as it was during its heyday more than 80 years ago. The Hambach and Hellmann Meat Store is located within the Brady Street Historic District which has both Local and National Register Designation. ❖

# WEST SIDE

## Schlitz Brewing Co. Complex

N. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive & W. Galena Street

Ethnic Origin: German



"Schlitz! The beer that made Milwaukee famous!" was an advertising slogan that had instant recognition in America during the early part of this century. Beer, perhaps more than any other single product, built the reputation and fashioned the social life of 19th century Milwaukee. Schlitz was only the nation's tenth largest brewery in 1877, but by 1895 had risen to third behind the Anheuser-Busch Co. of St. Louis and the giant Pabst Brewing Co. Brewing, more than any other industry, gave Milwaukee national and international fame. For these reasons, brewery-related architecture is especially important in Milwaukee.

### Background History

The Schlitz Brewing Co. traces its origins to a brewery founded in 1849 by August Krug near the corner of N. 4th St. and W. Highland Ave. In 1856, after Krug died, the firm's German immigrant bookkeeper, Joseph Schlitz, gained control of the business. In 1870 he moved it to its

present location near the intersection of N. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. and W. Walnut St. so that the business would have room to expand.

After Schlitz lost his life on a steamship voyage to Germany in 1875, the Uihlein family assumed control of the firm and steadily increased the size and market share of the brewery. By the early 1880s, Schlitz beer was shipped in barrels and bottles all over the United States, Mexico, Central America, and Brazil.

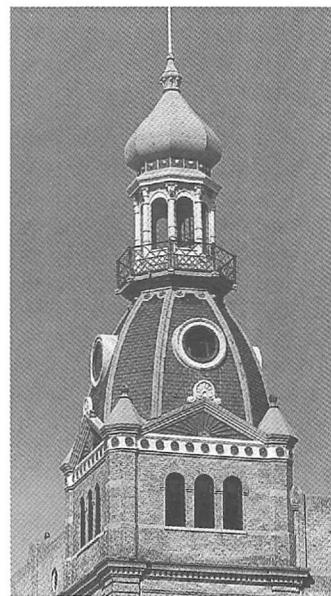
Schlitz was purchased by the Stroh Brewing Co. of Detroit in 1982. The Milwaukee brewery was subsequently closed and converted to an office park. Schlitz brand beer is now brewed by the Stroh Co., but not in Milwaukee. A number of the buildings in the complex were demolished during the 1980s, but much of the 19th century German architectural character has survived intact. Following are some of the highlights of this historic complex.

### Stock House

Northeast corner of W. Galena St. and N. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.

The most eye-catching building in the brewery is the stock house, which is topped with one of the finest German-inspired towers in the city. Since its completion about 1900, it has been the architectural focal point of the complex. The bulbous copper dome on the slate roofed tower reflects the exuberance of 18th century German Baroque architecture. The other major architectural feature of this huge building is a spectacular German Renaissance style tiered gable that faces N. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. about mid-way in the block north of W. Galena St.

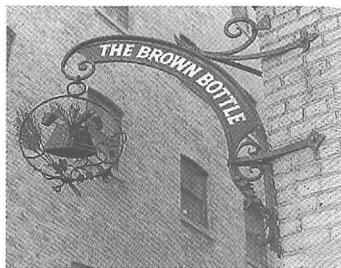
The distinctive belted globe logo plaque of the Schlitz Company is centered in the gable. This ornamental gable is another reminder of the German heritage of the brewing company's founders.



## The Brown Bottle

223 W. Galena St.

Although its exterior is not particularly remarkable, this building contains a wonderfully ethnic interior that should not be missed. Inside is an authentic German style "rathskeller" that was built in the 1930s to entertain Schlitz Brewery visitors. Today it is a popular restaurant open to the public. In Germany, a rathskeller is an eating and drinking establishment located in the basement of a town hall.



the corner of N. 2nd and W. Pleasant Sts. is the old Stable Building, built in 1896, which features lifelike figures of horses' heads and reflects the German love of bold sculptural ornament. The stable housed the big draft horses that once pulled the beer wagons in the days before motorized vehicles. ❖



Today, a visit to the Brown Bottle pub and restaurant is one of the rare opportunities in this country to experience a bit of "Old World" German interior design. The bar room features massive groin-vaulted plaster ceilings that were carefully painted to imitate the aged golden patina that is characteristic of centuries-old rathskellers in Germany. The main dining room features a splendid ornamental plaster ceiling, fine hand-carved woodwork, and hand-forged light fixtures made by the famous Milwaukee craftsman, Cyril Colnik.

After visiting the Brown Bottle, tourgoers may be interested in viewing two other buildings in the Schlitz



complex which are less ethnic in character but nevertheless interesting. To the east at 1560 N. 2nd St. is the former Bottling House built in 1902 of local cream colored brick and crowned with a German stepped gable. To the north at

# Frederick Ketter Building

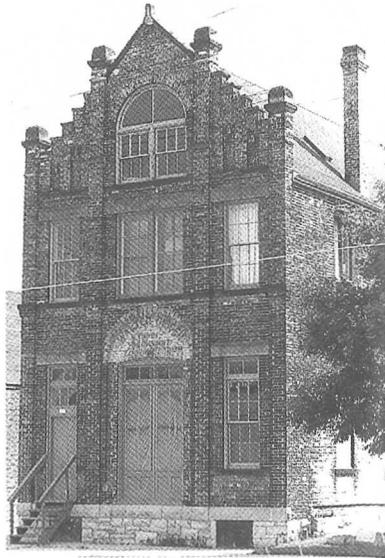
Year Built: 1890-1891

325 W. Vine Street

Architect: unknown

Ethnic Origin: German

Standing in the shadows of the Schlitz Brewing Company is a remarkable little building that would be equally at home amidst the townhouses built by 13th century merchants in German cities such as Lubeck and Visby. It is a 19th century version of a form that evolved in medieval northern German cities to combine workplace, residence and warehouse all in one compact building on the narrow city lots within the densely-settled fortified towns of the Middle Ages where space was at a premium.



This Milwaukee building was erected by Frederick Ketter in 1890-1891. Ketter was born on Feb. 26, 1845 in Weilburg, Hesse-Nassau, Germany, not far from Frankfurt. He received a village education and apprenticed as a cooper. A cooper is a skilled craftsman who makes wooden barrels. After working as a journeyman in his native land, Ketter emigrated to the U.S. in 1867 and settled in Milwaukee. City directories show that Ketter worked as the foreman of the Schlitz Brewing Company's cooper shop. Breweries all had their own large cooperage shops at the time because beer had to be stored and shipped in wooden barrels. In 1879 Ketter moved into a house around the corner at 1728 N. 4th St. (razed) where he lived until his death in 1911. Having decided to start his own cooperage business, Ketter purchased a half-lot fronting on Vine Street around the corner from his house in August of 1890 and subsequently built this structure.

Ketter's German heritage probably inspired the design of this building, which reflects the townhouse architecture commonly built in the important trading towns of Northern Europe from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The

Ketter building is constructed with a limestone basement and cream brick walls, now darkened from pollution. Like its European predecessors, it sits on a long narrow lot with the gable end facing the street. Of particular note are the four brick pilaster strips which rise through each story and break through the gable to terminate in pinnacles at the roofline. To further enliven the skyline, the gable end is stepped. Below the steps are shallow decorative niche-like recesses. The facade design is Gothic in origin and variations on this form were common in Lubeck and other Baltic Sea trading centers in the pre-Renaissance era. Hundreds of examples of this type of late medieval building still stood in Germany in the 19th century, before the devastation of the two world wars destroyed so many of them, and they served as models for late 19th century German architects who were seeking new designs to adapt to the needs of the prospering merchant class.

Ketter's business must have soon outgrown this cramped facility, and in 1894 he moved his cooperage to 30th and Galena Streets. In December of 1906 Ketter sold the building to George, Edward and Dietrich Geiger who operated a successful grocery business next door at the southwest corner of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. and Vine St. The Geigers used the Ketter Building as a grocery warehouse until they sold it on land contract to Abraham Rubenstein and Jacob Yanowitz in July of 1927. The new owners rented it to a number of tenants including a plaster works and a flax seed grinding company. The Geigers regained possession of the property in the mid-1930s and operated a horseradish and bottled honey business out of the building for a decade before selling it to new owners who leased it

out to a variety of manufacturers. Much like the historic European townhouses that inspired it, the current owner operates a ceramics business on the first floor and lives in a loft apartment on the second floor. The Ketter Building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. ❖



*This 13th century building in Visby, Germany illustrates the type of Burgherhaus which combined living quarters, shop and warehouse all under one roof and which inspired the design of the Ketter building.*

*Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library.*

## Pabst Brewing Company Complex

Year Built: 1880's-1900's

Architect: unknown

901 W. Juneau Avenue and vicinity Ethnic Origin: German



Pabst Brewing Company, General View

Milwaukee's Pabst Brewing Company complex is one of the most important landmarks in the history of the American brewing industry. By the close of the 19th century, Pabst's German recipe beer was famous nationwide and the brewery ranked as the world's largest. Today, the brewery complex is rich in Old World character and it features one of the best-preserved collections of German-inspired industrial and brewery-related architecture in the Midwest.

The Pabst Brewing Company offers a guided tour through its historic complex. Please call the brewery at 223-3709 for the times and location of the tour. Remember, however, that the brewery buildings are functioning production facilities and visitors must be escorted at all times when they venture onto brewery property.

### Background History

The brewery was founded in 1844 as the Best Brewing Company by Jacob Best, a German immigrant. In 1862, Frederick Pabst, a German-born Lake Michigan steamship captain, married Jacob Best's granddaughter. He later became president of the brewery in 1866.

The name of the Best Brewery was formally changed to the Pabst Brewing Company on March 18, 1889. By that time, however, the brewing industry and many consumers

had already associated Best beer with the colorful personality of "Captain" Pabst. Incidentally, Pabst's remarkable German-Renaissance style mansion is still standing at 2000 West Wisconsin Avenue and is featured in the city's "Ethnic House Tour" booklet. It is now run as a museum and is well worth touring.

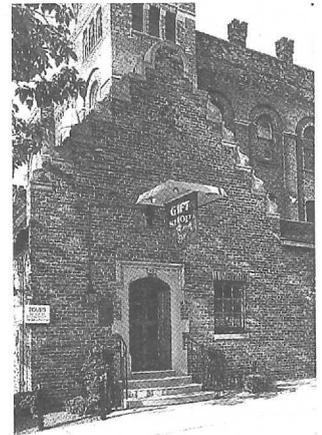
By 1895, Pabst was the world's largest brewery and much of the one million barrel per year production was shipped nationwide. By that time, the brewery was a sprawling complex that covered several city blocks. Compared with the peak years of the brewery at the turn of the century, the complex is much smaller in size today. What remains still retains much of its original character. Touring the Pabst Brewery is an excellent way to gain a better understanding of the German heritage of the firm's founders, and their centuries-old methods of making beer. The following descriptions highlight some of the more distinctive examples of ethnic architecture that are to be found in the complex today. The Pabst Brewing Company Complex is a Locally Designated Milwaukee Historic District.

### Gift Shop/Reception Building

901 W. Juneau Avenue

Year Built: 1933

The impressive cluster of buildings on the southwest corner of N. 9th Street and W. Juneau Ave. is a showcase of German-style architecture. The newest structure in the group is this 1-story, tan brick, German Renaissance Revival style reception building. Its design reflects the German architectural theme of the entire brewery complex. The ethnic character of this building is embodied primarily in the outstanding shaped front gable which is reminiscent of 16th and 17th century German burghers' houses.

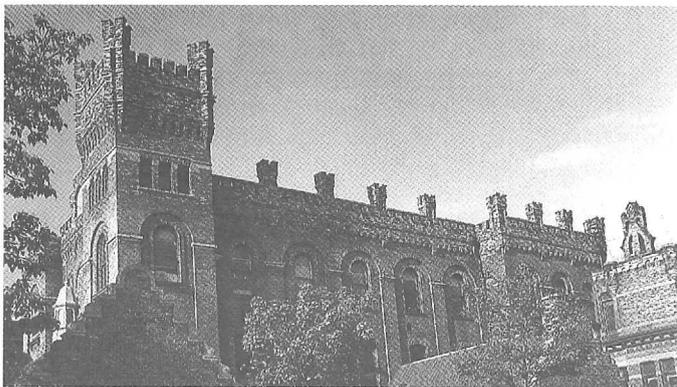


### Office Building Complex

915-917 W. Juneau Avenue

Year Built: 1858, 1880, 1892

The large, 3-story office building, located behind the reception center, was originally the Jefferson Public School, which was built by the City of Milwaukee in the Italianate style in 1858. Pabst purchased the school in 1886 for use as



an office building and subsequently completely remodeled it in the style of a German medieval castle. The walls of the building are topped with tooth-like projections called "crenelations" that copy the battlements which were used in medieval times to protect soldiers. This "battlemented" style of architecture is repeated throughout the Pabst complex.

The smaller, but superbly detailed, 2-story, towered building at 917 W. Juneau Avenue, was built in 1880 as the main office building. The round, crenelated corner turret is a fine reflection of German medieval architecture. It was added to the building in 1892 according to the designs of the noted German-American architect, Otto Strack. The tower is topped with a spiky, slate-roofed spire that gives it even more of a storybook castle appearance.

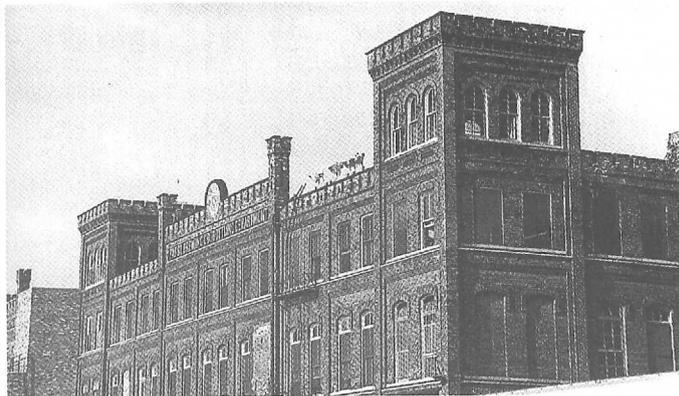


### Bottling House

1100 N. 10th Street

Year Built: 1889, 1910, 1911

The bottling house is one of the largest buildings in the complex and it covers almost an entire city block. Built in three phases, beginning in 1889, this 2-story structure is embellished with crenelated walls, an unusually ornamental feature for a utilitarian, industrial building. The architecture, however, reflects the prestige and importance of the brewing industry in the late 19th century.



### Pabst Saloon and Restaurant

1037 W. Juneau Avenue

Year Built: 1872

Pabst purchased this former church, which was built for the First German Methodist Episcopal congregation, and remodeled it extensively in 1898 for use as a restaurant and saloon. The renovations included removing the original steeple from the tower and adding the present German style crenelated brickwork in its place. Pabst leased the building to various managers over the years and for several decades it was known as the Forst-Keller Restaurant. Until the restaurant closed in 1971, it had been the regular meeting place for 33 years of Milwaukee's Liederkrantz German singing society. It is now used for various brewery purposes. ♦



## Pabst Brewing Company Saloon

Year Built: 1896

Architect: Charles G. Hoffmann

1338-40 W. Juneau Avenue

Ethnic Origin: German



Recalling the architecture of medieval German castles, this former brewery-owned corner saloon was a stylish venue that specialized in serving Pabst beer. Its distinctive architecture was intended to evoke nostalgic associations with the brewing traditions of old Germany.

This particular type of castle-like architecture was favored by the Pabst Brewing Company for its buildings during the late 19th century when the firm was under the leadership of Captain Frederick Pabst. Several of the buildings at Pabst's main brewery in Milwaukee were designed in a similar architectural style.

The focal point of the tavern's exterior is a square, 3-story corner tower that is topped with "crenelated" walls that mimic the battlements of medieval castles. Centuries ago, crenelated walls had the function of protecting the defenders of a fortress in the event of attack. The decorative brickwork located immediately beneath the crenellation at the top of the wall is called a "corbel table frieze," a feature that is common to many German medieval churches and castles.

The round, terra cotta Pabst Brewing Company logo plaque is still clearly visible between the windows on the second story facing West Juneau Avenue. The medieval character of the building is enhanced by pointed, Gothic arches at the entry vestibules on the first story and Gothic-style drip mouldings over the tops of the second story windows.

The building also recalls the advertising and sales practices of the late 19th century brewing industry. Beginning in the mid-1880s, many American breweries, including Pabst, initiated a marketing strategy to boost beer sales by owning their own saloons and leasing them to operators who would promise to carry only that particular brewery's beer.

Pabst established taverns in American cities all the way from Nebraska to Massachusetts, but the greatest concentration was in the Milwaukee area. By 1920, the phenomenon of brewery-owned saloons had faded into history because of Prohibition and government anti-trust legislation that made it illegal for breweries to own real estate that did not directly relate to the production of beer. The breweries were subsequently forced to sell off their taverns to independent owners.

August Beckmann was the first manager of this saloon in 1896; he was succeeded in 1901 by Gotthilf Reuther. The last manager before the Prohibition Act of 1919 temporarily ended the sale of nearly all alcoholic beverages in America, was Mrs. Amalia Reuther, the widow of Gotthilf.

This tavern, like many others after 1919, soon reopened as a "soft drink parlor" where malted non-alcoholic beverages, such as Pabst's "near beer," were served. After the Prohibition Act was repealed in 1933, alcoholic beverages could again be served legally, and the building reverted to use as a tavern under the management of Adolph Koenig. Over the years several different owners operated the tavern, but today the building is used as a church. The Pabst Brewing Company Saloon is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. ♦

## Schlitz Brewing Company Saloon

Year Built: 1894

Architect: Charles Kirchoff, Jr.

1703 W. Hopkins Street

Ethnic Origin: German

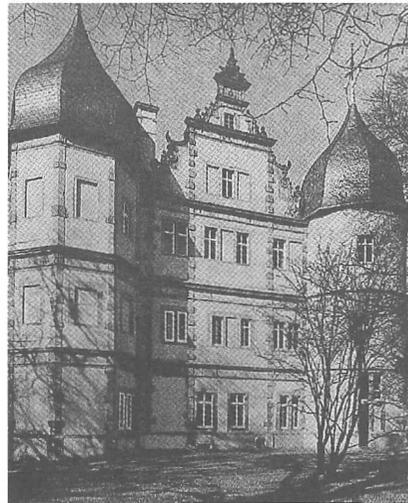


The German ethnic character of this former brewery-owned corner "saloon" is embodied primarily in its eye-catching helmet-like domes that are topped with spiky finials. In Germany, the architectural history of the helmet-shaped, domed roof can be traced back to at least the 16th century. Helmet roofs were then called "Italian bonnets" or, in German, "welche hauben" because they were said to have been inspired by early Italian Renaissance style domes. In Germany today, helmet-shaped domed roofs can still be seen atop the towers of many old manor houses and castles. It was no accident that the architects for the Schlitz Brewing Company chose this quintessentially German feature to call attention to their saloon and evoke associations between Old World brewing traditions and their client's beer.

The metal-clad domed roofs that top this building are fine examples of the advanced skills possessed by Milwaukee's carpenters during the late 19th century. Craftsmanship such as this is difficult to duplicate today and very important to preserve. The walls of the building are made of Milwaukee's celebrated "cream brick" which was prized for its soft golden yellow hue. Cream colored brick is unique to the Milwaukee area and some of it was exported as far away as Germany for the ornamentation of buildings.

In the late 19th century, it was a common practice for large American brewers such as Schlitz, to build or purchase their own saloons and restaurants and then rent them to tenant managers, who, in turn, would promise to sell only the owner's beer. Schlitz was one of the pioneers among America's big 19th century brewers in acquiring or building taverns and restaurants in order to promote the sale of its German-recipe beers. By the early 1890s, Schlitz already owned more than 50 taverns and restaurants in the Milwaukee area. The brewery-owned saloons were typically very well constructed and often located on street corners where there was plenty of traffic. They usually ranked among the most architecturally outstanding structures in their neighborhoods.

The first manager of this tavern was Albert Renske who lived in the shopkeeper's flat above the saloon. The Prohibition Act of 1919 closed the doors for good on many saloons, while others continued in business as "soft drink parlors" where non-alcoholic beverages were served. This former tavern, however, was converted to retail use and was rented to the North Side Auto Trimming Co. in 1920. By the late 1920s, the building was vacant, but in 1934, one year after the Prohibition Act was repealed and alcohol could again be served legally, Gustave J. Klawitter reopened it as a tavern. It is still used as a tavern today. ❖



*Bell-shaped domes like these at the Castle at Barntrop (1584-1588) are a common feature on German buildings.*

*Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library*

# Milwaukee

## Ethnic Commercial and Public Buildings Tour

*The rich heritage of immigrant architecture*



⑱ Site location numbers are the page numbers of the description of each property.

● Freeway exit ramps

LAKE MICHIGAN

## Henry Van Ells Drug Store

Year Built: 1903 Architect: Julius Leiser & Charles J. F. Holst  
2654 W. Fond du Lac Avenue Ethnic Origin: Dutch



The Van Ells Drug Store is a fine example of a small ethnic commercial building designed in the exuberant Flemish Renaissance Revival style. The flamboyant, step-like front gable with its fine ornamental scrollwork is the principal hallmark of that style.

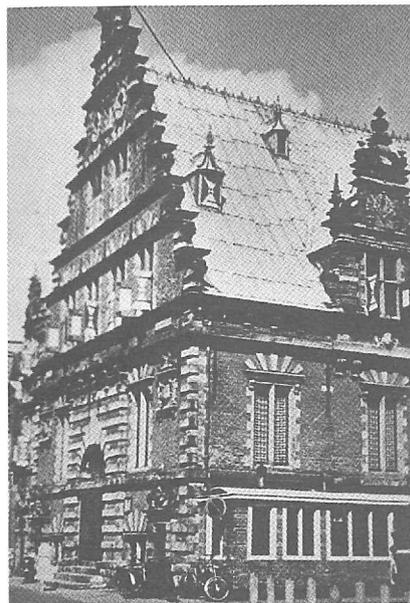
Flemish Renaissance architecture developed in the early 16th century in a region of Europe known as Flanders, which is now spread over parts of northeastern France and Belgium. Historically, Flanders was closely associated with the Netherlands, which is also known as Holland. Henry Van Ells, for whom this building was constructed, was a Dutch immigrant from Holland and the architecture of his building undoubtedly reminded him of his homeland.

The Netherlands was the cradle of Northern European Renaissance style art and architecture during the 16th and 17th centuries. The term "Renaissance" refers to the period when architecture and art turned away from the Gothic tradition and began to imitate the architectural and artistic ideals of ancient Rome. The scrolled gable was not a form borrowed directly from ancient classical architecture, but it

nevertheless became the most characteristic feature of Northern European Renaissance style architecture. The scrolled gable quickly became a highly influential design motif throughout northern Germany and Poland as well. The Van Ells Drug Store is patterned after the Butchers Hall of 1603 in Haarlem, the Netherlands, one of the most famous Flemish Renaissance style buildings in the world.

Henry Van Ells started his career in Milwaukee as a South Side pharmacist at the Hassinger and Van Ells Drug store on W. Forest Home Ave. in 1892. By the late 1890s he had his own store in the heart of a bustling South Side business district at S. 6th and W. Mitchell Streets. His success at that location enabled him to make his final move to this fine structure at the busy, 6-point intersection of W. Fond du Lac Ave., W. Center St. and N. 27th St.

Van Ells lived above the store in the large shopkeeper's flat through about 1921. A few years after Van Ells moved out, the second floor was remodeled into medical offices. A pharmacy was continuously in business on the first floor of the building until 1979 when the space was remodeled to house the Family Dental Center. ♦



*Butchers Hall,  
Haarlem, the Netherlands  
(1603)*

## Miller Brewing Company Complex

**Year Built:** 1890's-1900's

**Architect:** unknown

**4000 W. State Street and vicinity**

**Ethnic Origin:** German

The lively spirit and zest of Milwaukee's German heritage is reflected in the architecture of several turn-of-the-century buildings contained within the vast Miller Brewing Company complex. The city's world-famous brewing industry is rooted in the "Old World" traditions brought to Milwaukee by the German immigrants who poured into the area beginning in the 1840s. The Miller Brewing Company is proud of its history and hosts an informative guided tour of the complex. You can call the brewery at 931-2337 for tour information. Please remember that the brewery is a functioning production facility, and its buildings are private. Visitors must be escorted at all times if they venture onto the brewery property, but the exteriors of all of these buildings are visible from the public street.

### Background History

The Miller Brewery began as a small, isolated "brewery village" located in the countryside west of the city. Today, the city has long since surrounded the brewery, which is now one of America's largest. The complex still retains much of its original Old World character. The small wood frame building located at the top of a bluff in the 3900 block of W. State Street is a reproduction of one of the original brewery buildings. Although an interesting example of a pioneer era industrial structure, it is not an example of ethnic architecture.

The brewery was founded in 1855 by Frederick Miller, a German immigrant, who purchased what was then called the Plank Road Brewery, which had been established on the site in 1848. Under Miller's leadership, the brewery expanded rapidly, and a remarkable network of brick and limestone-lined beer storage caves were carved into the bluff on the south side of W. State Street. The use of caves for cooling, which had been done for centuries in Europe, is a fascinating reminder of how beer and other food products were sometimes preserved in the days before the advent of modern refrigeration. The caves, which are still extant, have not been used for beer production since about 1906.

Miller began marketing its beer nationally during the late 19th century, and the size of the brewery continued to increase. In 1919, however, the U.S. Congress passed the 18th Amendment which outlawed the production and sale

of alcoholic beverages in America. During the era that followed, known as "Prohibition," Miller ceased brewing beer and, in its place, made malt syrup, soft drinks, a cereal beverage, and other non-alcoholic products. When the 18th Amendment was repealed in 1933, Miller immediately resumed producing beer. Today, Miller is America's second largest brewer.

### The Brewery's Ethnic Architecture

Although, many of the old buildings in the complex have a strong German character, the following are some of the most exuberant examples. These buildings are all visible from West State Street.

#### Visitors' Center/Miller Inn

**3931 W. State Street**

**Year Built:** 1892

The visitors' center, which is a good example of a small German-influenced brewery building, is topped with "crenelated" walls that copy the battlements of medieval German castles. Centuries ago, crenelated walls had the



practical function of protecting the defenders of a fortress in the event of attack, but here they were used just to evoke associations with medieval German castles, like the famous ones along the Rhine River. This building, like most of the others in the complex, is constructed of Milwaukee's unique cream-colored brick, but, since it has never been cleaned, it has now weathered to a grayish hue after a century of exposure to the elements.

## Brew House

4003 W. State Street

Year Built: 1886, 1906

Designed in the bold, Romanesque style that was preferred by Milwaukee's German burghers during the 1880s, this tall building contained the massive copper kettles where German recipe beer was brewed during the



late 19th century. The large round arches and white rusticated limestone trim are hallmarks of the style. The entry door is topped with a triangular, Renaissance style "pediment," which was a feature common to many 16th and 17th century buildings in Germany. The top story of the building was added in 1906, and it features a German Renaissance style gable.

## Packaging Center

4036 W. State Street

Year Built: about 1895

Miller was distributing beer nationwide by the time the packaging center was built. It is reminiscent of old German Gothic style fortresses. The pointed window tops on the third story are one of the principal hallmarks of the Gothic style. The tops of the walls are trimmed with ornamental brickwork called a "corbel table frieze," which was often seen on medieval churches and fortresses. The semicircular brick "relieving arches" above the tops of the flat-topped windows are also a reminder of a medieval building practice. This structural feature is used to carry the weight of a heavy masonry wall above a series of closely-spaced windows so that the windows won't cave-in under the weight of the upper wall.



## Stable/Garage Building

4103 W. State Street

Year Built: 1896

In the days when horse-drawn wagons delivered Miller beer to Milwaukee's taverns and restaurants, this brick stable was a bustling hub of activity. The influence of German design can be seen in the bold stone arches that outline the entry portals and imbue the building with a castle-like character. The horses were stabled on the first floor and basement level of the building, while the upper floors were used for workshops and for the storage of wagons, feed, harnesses, tack, and other equipment. ❖



# SOUTH SIDE

## Fred J. Borgwardt Building

Year Built: 1902

823 W. National Avenue

Architect: Charles Lesser

Ethnic Origin: German

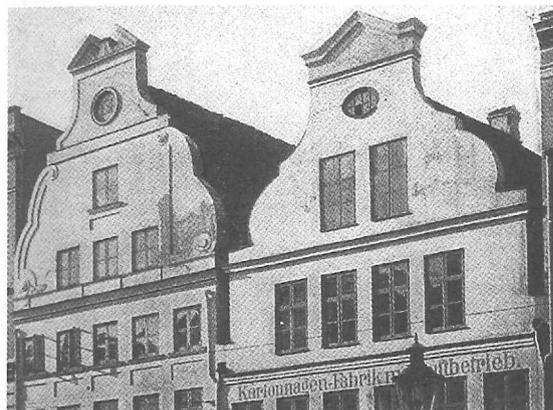


The Borgwardt name proudly emblazoned on the front of this building is one long associated with Milwaukee's South Side. Fred J. Borgwardt was 9 years of age when he came from Germany with his parents, Fred and Sophia Borgwardt and settled in Milwaukee. Probably influenced by his carpenter father, Fred took up cabinetmaking and then went into the furniture business, first in partnership with George I. Prasser and then on his own in 1885 when he was 26 years old. One local history indicates that his store carried a large stock of fancy parlor and bedroom furniture as well as sideboards, wardrobes, office, hall and library furniture. Selling caskets was also an important part of Borgwardt's business, as it was with most furniture dealers at that time. As a result, it was easy for him to make the transition into the, then, up-and-coming profession of undertaking. Borgwardt studied at the Clark Embalming School and, finally, in 1897, he discontinued selling furniture to concentrate exclusively on undertaking.

In 1902 Borgwardt constructed this new building to house his undertaking business. Before the advent of the residential style funeral home that we know today, many funeral parlors operated out of storefronts like this one. This was possible because, until the 1920s, most funeral events took place in the deceased's home or at a church rather than at a funeral home. Borgwardt and his family lived in the flat above the store, a practice common among merchants since the Middle Ages.

The long narrow building follows another tradition set by Northern European merchants, as well, by having its gable end facing the street richly ornamented to reflect the identity and prestige of its owner. Local architect Charles L. Lesser captured the essence of the German Renaissance and Baroque Revival styles by using S and C scrolls to create the sensuously curvilinear profile of the gable. The dramatic broken pediment crowning the gable can trace its origins back to the townhouses of 17th century merchants in such German cities as Lubeck, Greifswald and Luneburg.

Fred J. Borgwardt did not long enjoy his beautiful new building. He died suddenly in 1909 at the age of 50, but his sons carried on his undertaking business, eventually moving it to 1817 W. National Ave. in 1923. His descendants still operate undertaking establishments in suburban Hales Corners and Wauwatosa today. ❖



*Curvilinear gables with pedimented tops date back to the Baroque period as these two buildings from Lubeck, Germany illustrate.*

*Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library*

## Jacob Cohen Shoe Shop

Year Built: 1911

Architect: Arthur Seidenschwartz

2104-06 W. National Avenue

Ethnic Origin: German



The sweeping curves of the front gable of this former shoe shop call attention to its German Renaissance style architecture. The building is located in a small cluster of commercial structures that served the surrounding German-American residential neighborhood during the early 20th century.

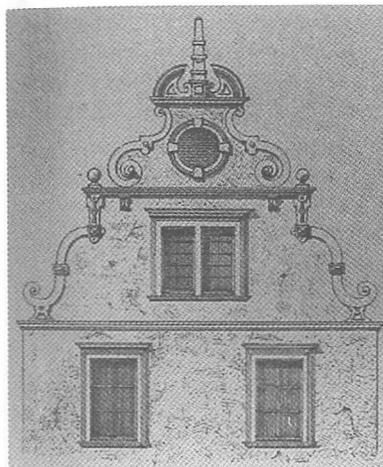
The Jacob Cohen building features yet another variation on the dramatic curving, shaped gables that characterize much of the city's ethnic commercial architecture. The profile of this gable, which has a flame-like appearance because it curves in and then out, is referred to as an "ogee" curve. The curving shaped gable was an architectural feature that was widely employed by German and Flemish designers in the 16th and 17th centuries to distinguish the homes and commercial buildings of wealthy burghers and merchants.

The dormers that project from the roof of Milwaukee's City Hall, built in 1892 at 200 E. Wells St., have similarly shaped ogee gables that could have inspired the design for the Cohen building. Coincidentally, ogee-shaped gables are also prominent features of one of the city's newest downtown skyscrapers, completed in 1989 at 100 E. Wisconsin Ave. It was designed to pay homage to Milwaukee's heritage of German-inspired architecture.

When Jacob Cohen moved into this building, his business was called the Electric Shoe Repair Shop. Over the years, however, he gradually shifted the focus of his business to selling shoes instead of repairing them. He had opened his first shoe repair business in 1908 nearby at 2022 W. National Ave. when he was 29 years old.

Jacob Cohen and his wife, Clara, were both immigrants from Czarist Russia who listed their mother tongue as Jewish in the 1920 Milwaukee County census. He came to America in 1895 at the age of 16, and Clara had arrived nine years earlier in 1886. Until 1922 they lived with their six children in the second floor shopkeeper's flat above their shoe store. In 1923 the family moved to a house at 2171 N. 40th St. on the city's West Side. In 1924 Cohen moved his store down the block to 2134 W. National Ave., and a grocer, Mrs. Louis Kadlec, then moved into Cohen's former shoe store.

The designer of the building, Arthur Seidenschwartz, was a southsider who lived nearby at 736 S. 23rd St. He started his career around 1905 as a machinist before becoming a draftsman by 1908 and a registered architect in 1919. The Cohen Building is a fine example of his early design work and an excellent contribution to the city's stock of ethnic architecture. ❖



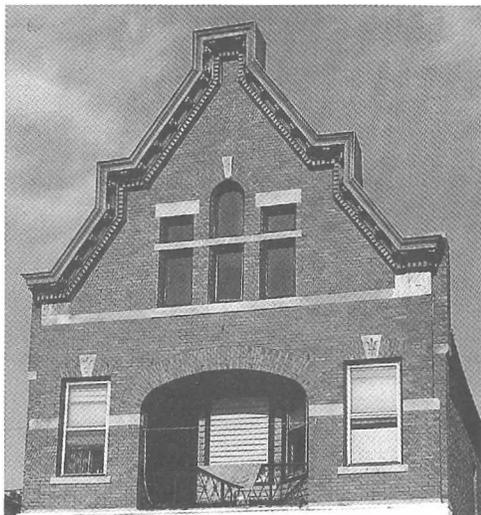
*The curvaceous lines of Baroque gables such as this one from Trier, Germany, inspired local adaptations like the Cohen Building*

*Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library*

## Anton Singer Building

Year Built: 1906  
901 S. 16th Street

Architect: Charles L. Lesser  
Ethnic Origin: German



This handsome store building, built for Anton Singer, typifies the fine structures which were constructed along S. 16th Street between National and Greenfield Avenues during its heyday as an important commercial district. While most of the area's larger and more flamboyant buildings were razed in the 1980s, examples like this one survive to demonstrate how individual merchants strove to architecturally compete with one another by constructing eye-catching facades to call attention to their businesses.

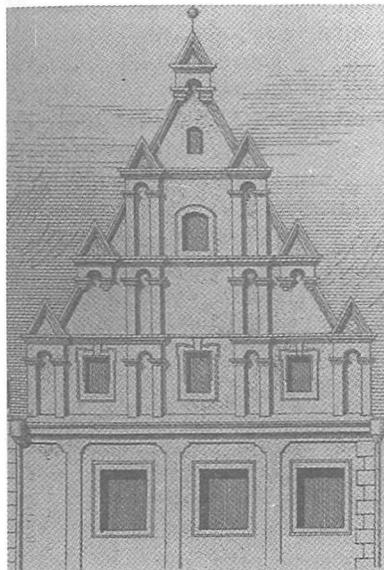
Anton Singer was born in Wisconsin in 1858 to German immigrants Joseph and Theresa Singer, who lived on the city's South Side. Anton originally worked as a carpenter, but went into partnership with Adolph Schaefer to open a marble works across from Forest Home Cemetery in 1885. The company mostly made cemetery monuments and headstones. When that partnership dissolved, Singer opened his own monument company. He stayed in the monument business near Forest Home Cemetery until he retired in 1911.

South 16th St., which was originally a residential street, began to develop commercially in the 1890s, and by 1910 virtually all of the houses had been converted to stores or were removed to make way for new commercial buildings. Anton Singer took advantage of this trend by replacing his own house with the present solid masonry building in

1906. The Singer family, including sons Edwin, Anthony and Ambrose L., moved into one of the two upstairs flats.

Rather than design a plain building, local architect Charles Lesser produced a memorable facade in the German Renaissance Revival style. A Milwaukee native, born in 1864, Lesser was trained in his profession through the time-honored apprenticeship method, first working under architect Howland Russel and then with local architects T. N. Philpot, Gustav Leipold, and Henry J. Van Ryn. In a variation on the traditional German shaped gable, the finely articulated sloping copper cornice breaks out into distinctive angled corners that give the gable a dramatic profile. The unusual 3-part attic window, the numerous stone accents, and the second story recessed porch set within a wide brick arched opening add to the originality of this unorthodox design. The rust-colored brick of the facade was a type highly favored by German-American clients at the turn of the century.

Since Singer built the building as a rental property, he never had his own business on the first floor. Although the earliest tenants of the Singer storefront are not known, the first recorded occupant was Frank A. Prasser, a commercial photographer, who had his business here in 1911. Henry Jenk began using the store as a fruit and vegetable market in 1920, and later occupants included a restaurant, a shoe repair shop, and an electrical appliance store. Anton Singer died of cancer at the age of 53 in 1912. He was followed in death by his widow, Katherine, in 1917 at the age of 58. The Singer heirs apparently sold the building in 1919. ♦



*Straight sided gables with pointed cusps such as this 17th Century example from Germany probably inspired the unusual cusped gables on the Singer building.*

*Photo Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library*

## William Stange Building

Year Built: 1909  
1305 S. 16th Street

Architect: Henry Voelz  
Ethnic Origin: German



This handsome storefront is one of only two structures in the Germanic style to survive on South 16th Street, once a bustling thoroughfare with butcher shops, grocery stores, shoe and clothing stores, movie theaters, and halls for fraternal organizations with many German-inspired buildings. It was built for William Stange, a German immigrant who came to the U.S. around 1870 at the age of 34. We know Stange worked for the Hilty Lumber Co. in 1890, but he is otherwise listed in the city directories merely as a laborer. Stange moved to S. 16th St. with his wife, Sophia, and their children, Anna, Clara, Henry and Charles, in 1886 and lived in a modest frame cottage on this site. When the sparsely settled street began to develop as a major commercial district, Stange moved the family's cottage to the rear of the site and built the present brick veneered structure in front of it in 1909 at a cost of \$6,500. Stange evidently sought to emulate some of the more flamboyant German style buildings that had already been constructed in the area, and commissioned architect Henry Voelz to design something similar for him. Voelz was a young, Milwaukee-born architect just starting his own practice at the time. Like the nearby Singer Building at 901 S. 16th St., the gable end is given prominence by boldly

shaping the massive cornice to create an eye-catching notched profile. The heavy molded cornice contrasts with the simple flat treatment of the attic windows, second story oriel window, and storefront. Although this building is not a great architectural masterpiece of the German Renaissance Revival style, it is significant that architects of lesser talent, such as Voelz, were exploring the design possibilities of German-inspired architecture and popularizing that style throughout the city.

William Stange was 73 years of age when he erected this commercial building. He lived out his life in the rear family cottage, while his daughter Clara and her husband, Fred Ramlow, ran a dry goods shop out of the new building and lived in the upstairs flat. Stange died at the age of 76 in 1912, while his wife, Sophia, survived him for 13 more years before dying at 80 years of age in 1925. Ramlow retired from the dry goods business in 1928, and the building has since housed a variety of tenants selling goods ranging from paint to appliances. ❖

## Stanislaus J. Szymarek Grocery Store

Year Built: 1915

Architect: Henry W. Voelz

2029 W. Mitchell Street

Ethnic Origin: Polish



The ethnic architecture of the Szymarek Grocery Store is a reminder of the days when Milwaukee's Poles referred to Mitchell Street as the "Polish Highway" because it was the main commercial thoroughfare through the city's largest Polish neighborhood. The Eastern European Renaissance style building features what is perhaps one of the most unusual shaped gables to be found among Milwaukee's rich stock of ethnic commercial structures. The bold, sheet metal coping that outlines the gable features large projecting, pointed "cusps." The resulting profile is an interesting variation on the more typical European stepped gable, and is believed to reflect architectural traditions that have their roots in the early Renaissance buildings of Poland's largest cities such as Krakow, Posnan, and Warsaw. The Szymarek building is a good example of how a prominent architectural feature, such as a shaped gable, can imbue an otherwise ordinary building with ethnic character.

Constructed in 1915, the Polish ethnic character of the building reflects the nostalgia and pride that Polish-American immigrants felt for their former homeland. Also

reflecting an old European building tradition are the one-foot-thick, solid brick, load bearing walls. Most of Milwaukee's small commercial buildings, by comparison, are of less substantial wood frame construction that is "veneered" with an outer skin of one layer of brick that is not structural, but merely a decorative finish material. It was not unusual for Milwaukee's European-born businessmen to prefer the permanence and fire resistance of a solid masonry structure because they often intended to keep their business at one location for a long period of time. They were, in effect, building for the ages.

Before moving both his residence and grocery business to this building in 1915, Szymarek operated a combined grocery store and tavern nearby at 2037-39 W. Mitchell St. After Szymarek moved, a relative kept the tavern, known as a "Polish public house," operating at its original location. This block was a neighborhood commercial strip that developed in the shadow of the large St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church on the northwest corner of S. 17th and W. Mitchell Streets. Szymarek and his family were members of the church, which was originally a Polish-speaking parish, and following Polish tradition he and other merchants built their stores near the church to form a little village commercial center for their neighborhood.

Szymarek died on March 15, 1935 at the age of 60 and his wife, Stephania, ran the store after his passing for another year. By 1941 the store was rented to a beauty shop. In 1947 Dr. Joseph Szymarek, a physician, remodeled the first floor for use as his medical office. The building is still a physician's office today. ❖



The cusp-like forms on the Szymarek Grocery Store have their roots in such buildings as this one built in 1587 in Lubeck, Germany.

Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library

# Robert Perske Building

Year Built: 1909

Architect: H. C. Koch & Co.

1629-31 W. Becher Street

Ethnic Origin: German



Freestanding corner stores in the middle of residential areas are a common feature in Milwaukee's older neighborhoods. They were often occupied by saloons or else by merchants selling the groceries, meat or baked goods that people needed to shop for almost daily in the era before refrigerators. The brick store erected by Robert Perske at the corner of S. 17th and W. Becher Streets is an excellent example of this building type.

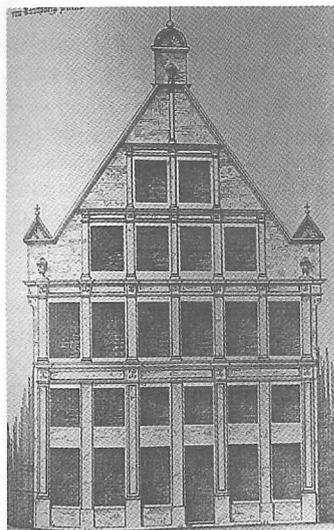
Perske was a German immigrant who arrived in the U.S. in May of 1890 at the age of 31. He settled on Milwaukee's predominantly Polish South Side and may have actually been part Polish, or perhaps was born in the Baltic Sea area where German and Polish cultures merged as a result of the long-term German dominion over a substantial part of northwest Poland. In a story paralleled by many ambitious immigrants, Perske worked his way up from laborer to saloonkeeper before opening his first bakery in 1903. Six years later he built the present structure to house his bakery with three flats upstairs.

To design his store, Perske contracted with one of the city's top architectural firms, H. C. Koch & Co., the firm responsible for creating our striking City Hall. Perske's building was one of the firm's few South Side commissions. Henry C. Koch was born in Germany but raised in this

country. He began his architectural training in Milwaukee before the Civil War and he had his own practice by 1870. Henry was elderly by 1909, in fact only a year away from his death, when he took the Perske commission, but he had his son, Armand D., working with him at the time.

The Perske Building's impressive facade is built of tan brick trimmed with stone. The projecting parapet on the gable end, here with a rounded profile at the peak, is characteristic of such German-influenced buildings. The gable is flanked by pairs of slender stone pinnacles that are topped with ball-shaped finials. These features are copied from those found on Late Gothic and Early Renaissance era buildings in Germany and along the German trade routes from the Low Countries to Poland. Between the finials are S-shaped scroll motifs and ornamental stone plaques. Above the attic windows, the topmost plaque spells out "Robert Perski." Below the attic windows is a shield carrying the building's date of construction, 1909. Interestingly, Perske later began spelling his name with an "e" at the end, and his death certificate shows his name as "Perske."

The Perske family, which included his wife, Anna, and his children, Eleanor, Frank, Helen and Herbert, lived in one of the upstairs flats. Perske ran his bakery downstairs until retiring in 1926, but he continued to live upstairs until his death at the age of 76 in 1936. After his widow, Anna, died at the age of 71 in 1947, the family sold the building. The new owners opened a tavern in the old bakery space, which had been vacant since Perske's retirement. The first floor continues to house a tavern. ❖



The Perske Building was inspired by buildings such as this 17th century example in Munster, Germany.

Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library

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## LINCOLN AVENUE OVERVIEW

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Although we generally associate the stepped and shaped gable form in architecture with German-American patrons, the shaped and stepped gable form was also utilized in highly inventive and creative ways by Milwaukee's Polish-American merchants. Many of these Polish storefronts are found on the city's South Side where the majority of the Poles lived. Over a dozen are concentrated along a short stretch of Lincoln Avenue alone.

While Mitchell Street, some six blocks north, became the major retailing center, the Main Street, as it were, of the South Side with its banks, large department stores and professional buildings, Lincoln Avenue evolved as more of a neighborhood shopping district. For many decades, Lincoln Avenue marked Milwaukee's southern city limits and, before 1900, was a relatively quiet thoroughfare. As residential development increased in the surrounding areas, Lincoln Avenue took on an increasingly commercial character, where one could find hardware stores, taverns, shoe shops, photo studios, clothing stores, jewelers, sweet shops, movie theaters, grocers, butchers and liquor stores.

Reflecting a European tradition, dating back to the late Middle Ages, merchants lived in apartments above their shops. Because of the long, narrow lots, the store buildings had their gable ends facing the street in the tradition of Northern European cities. The gables were elaborately ornamented with their size and detailing serving as an indication of the status and prestige of their owners. The long narrow lot with its short end to the street was typical of north German trading centers where land within the fortified walled towns of the period was very limited and expensive. These urban forms were carried into Poland along trade routes by German merchants who settled in Polish towns. Their townhouses were soon copied by the indigenous Polish populace. The simple stepped gable, dating back to the 13th century, was the earliest type of shaped gable to appear, but the form gradually evolved with the addition of scrolls, pediments and classical details. The shaped gable had become more curvilinear by the early 18th century as the Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo styles supplanted the angular Gothic tradition.

Why Milwaukee's Poles adopted the stepped and shaped gable forms, which were so closely associated

with Milwaukee's German community, is a complicated question that cannot be easily answered. It is known that Milwaukee's Poles were overwhelmingly from northern Poland and the Baltic seacoast areas, which had been subjected to German rule and cultural influences for many years. The multi-functional front gabled townhouse in which the merchant conducted his business, lived with his family, and stored his goods was a standard building type in such Polish cities as Gdansk. It seems likely that the Polish merchants in Milwaukee were familiar with these buildings in their native land and perhaps, to an immigrant merchant, they represented the attainment of success and an expression of ethnic pride. Interestingly, most of the Lincoln Avenue buildings with shaped gables were either built or remodeled into their present form between 1910 and 1920, and were possibly perceived as not being necessarily German in form but more generically "ethnic." Many of the merchants had previously occupied simple Victorian frame stores which they replaced as soon as circumstances would allow with fancier structures constructed of brick, a material denoting status among Milwaukee's workingclass Poles.

Local architects probably also played a role in the prevalence of ethnic-looking buildings. Most were Polish-American architects who had an exclusively South Side clientele. While there is no evidence that any had been trained or had studied in Europe, it is likely that they kept abreast of European trends through architectural periodicals.

A drive down Lincoln Avenue from South 5th to South 20th Streets is like taking a trip back into time when merchants built colorful, distinctive buildings to recall the market squares of their Polish hometowns. A description of a few of Lincoln Avenue's many interesting ethnic-style buildings follows.

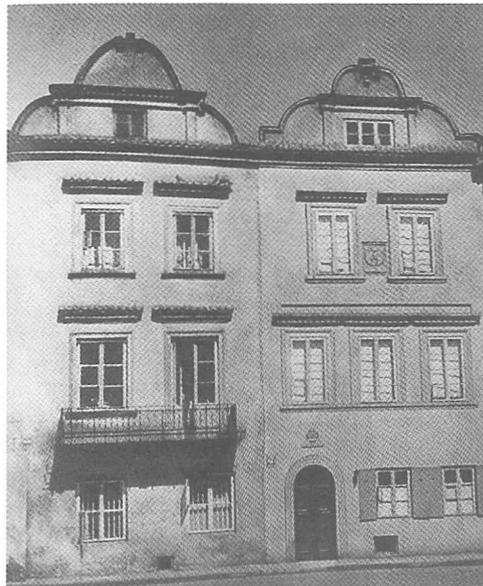
Gables with curvilinear profiles were popular in Poland. Milwaukee's Polish-American merchants sought to reflect the architecture of their homeland by using curved gables on their buildings.



*The market place at Jelenia Gora, Poland, dating to the first half of the 18th century.*



*The 18th century market place in Ladeck, Poland.*



*Canon's houses, Warsaw, Poland, built in the first half of the 17th century.*

*Photos courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library.*

## Grutza-Leszczynski Building

Year Built: 1899

Architect: E. Brielmaier & Sons

606-614 W. Lincoln Avenue

Ethnic Origin: Polish



The most dramatic and boldly sculptural of all of Lincoln Avenue's commercial buildings is the Grutza-Leszczynski Building at 606-614 W. Lincoln Ave. Fr. Grutza, the pastor of St. Josaphat's Basilica across the street, had this structure erected, some say with leftover materials from the church, while the church was in its final stages of construction. The well-known church architect, Erhard Brielmaier, designed this, one of his few commercial buildings, for Grutza and scaled it to complement the church he had also designed across the street. Brielmaier concentrated all of his detail on the second and attic stories, giving the building a somewhat top-heavy appearance. Large rounded broken pediments, once decorated with finials, top each of the projecting bays. The undulating rhythm created by the tops of the projecting bay windows, the dominance of the center bay, the classical detailing, and the use of curving, rounded forms are all characteristic of the Baroque style of architecture, which was in its heyday in 17th and early 18th century Europe. This is perhaps Milwaukee's best example of a Baroque Revival style commercial building.

Probably erected to provide income to help offset the enormous debt incurred in the construction of St. Josaphat's, the Grutza Building was first tenanted by a clothier and by Steve Rozga, who operated a furniture and undertaking establishment. Fr. Grutza turned the building over to the St. Josaphat parish trustees shortly before his death in 1901, and they, in turn, sold the property to Jacob Leszczynski, a prominent coal dealer. Leszczynski operated a shoe store and dry goods shop on the premises, and it is thought that the upper floor was divided into apartments. The Leszczynski estate owned the building until 1947. The storefronts have been much-remodeled from their original appearance. ❖

## Andrew Krzewinski Building

Year Built: 1907

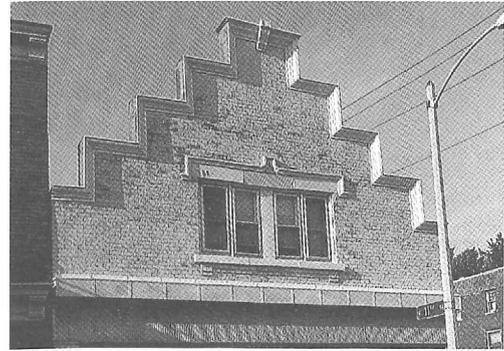
Architect: Stanley Kadow

Remodeled: 1911

Architect: Henry A. Kulas

1033 W. Lincoln Avenue

Ethnic Origin: Polish



The Krzewinski Building is patterned after Northern European townhouses of the Late Gothic and early Renaissance periods and features a simple, stepped profile without the addition of ornamental scrolls or pediments. A Gothic style label or drip moulding is incorporated above the grouping of windows in the attic area. Stylistically the building represents the late medieval brick architecture of Northern Europe before the revival of interest in Roman architecture introduced curving elements and classical detailing to building facades in the 16th century.

The building was erected in 1907 to house Krzewinski's dry goods business and a flat for the shopkeeper's family. It was substantially remodeled into its present form in 1911 by architect Henry A. Kulas, a southside architect who made the transition from carpenter to architect in the late 19th century. After Krzewinski remodeled his store in 1911 he operated a millinery shop and tailoring business out of the building until his untimely death at the age of 45 on April 8, 1916. The storefront has had numerous tenants since Krzewinski's death including a fruit store, smoke shop and dental office and has undergone substantial alteration. ❖



*Buildings with plain stepped gables can be seen in many central European towns.*

*Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library*

## SHAPED GABLE COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS ON LINCOLN AVENUE

The most numerous examples of ethnic-looking buildings on Lincoln Avenue are those that feature gables with curvilinear profiles. These lively, energetic curvaceous gables stand out conspicuously from their plain, angular neighbors and are based on the scrolled gables of European townhouses dating from the 17th to early 18th centuries when the Baroque and Rococo styles were predominant. In these local examples, however, the various S-scroll and C-scroll forms are very imaginatively interpreted in the interest of uniqueness rather than slavishly copying actual antique examples. In place of the detailed pediments, mouldings, and ornamental pieces found on many of the buildings commissioned by German clients, the Lincoln Avenue stores have flat, unornamented gable ends that depend entirely on their bold shapes for their design impact. A brief overview of some of the more interesting curvilinear-gabled structures follows.

### Stanley Dejewski Building

Year Built: unknown;  
Remodeled 1916

1131-1133 W. Lincoln Avenue

Architect: A. Michalak  
(1916 Remodeling)

Ethnic Origin: Polish

The eye-catching gable on this facade has a little more detail than most and features a fascia board that accentuates the flowing shape of the gable, which is ornamented with four short pilasters. Stanley Dejewski moved to an existing building on this corner in 1901 when he was 36 years of age and operated a saloon and an express business with his partner, Joseph Filipkowski. Dejewski later operated a grocery store here.



The old building was remodeled to its present form in 1916 at a cost of \$4,000, which included raising the roof and brick veneering the entire structure, as well as constructing a new front facade. Still later, Dejewski worked as a cabinetmaker. He died in 1944 at the age of 79. The storefront was later rented out to various tenants including a clothing store, a jewelry shop, and a drug store. The gable's original stucco cladding was covered with asbestos shingles in 1938. ❖

### Frank Bzdawka Building

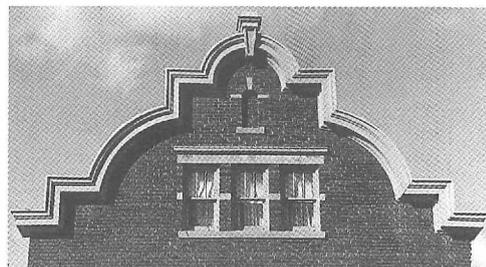
Year Built: 1919

1112-1114 W. Lincoln Avenue

Architect: unknown

Ethnic Origin: Polish

This is one of the handsomest commercial buildings on Lincoln Avenue with its boldly profiled combination of steps



and curves in the gable end, punctuated by a large keystone at the crest of the facade. Bzdawka, the son of Polish immigrants, took over a butcher shop run by Constantin Czarnecki on this site in 1910 and replaced the original, simple, wood frame building with the present brick one in 1919. The Bzdawka family lived in the upstairs flat. After Frank Bzdawka died at the age of 64 in 1944, the family continued to operate the meat market here through the 1960s. The street level storefront portion of the building is one of the few in the neighborhood to retain its original appearance. ❖

### Henry F. Czerwinski Building

Year Built: 1920

501-503 W. Lincoln Avenue

Architect: unknown

Ethnic Origin: Polish



This handsome brick building replaced a livery stable on the site and was constructed to house Henry F. Czerwinski's pharmacy. Czerwinski had previously worked as a clerk in drug stores owned by others before opening up his own business. His family lived nearby at 575 W. Lincoln Ave. in another shaped-gable building built by his immigrant father, Barney Czerwinski,

in 1912. Other early tenants of the Czerwinski Building were Dr. Robert P. Bergwall, a physician, and Dr. Robert E. Dunbar, a dentist. The building remained in use as a drug store into the mid-1960s. ❖

## Michal Wargin Building

Year Built: 1914

Architect: Stanley Kadow

1530-1534 W. Lincoln Avenue

Ethnic Origin: Polish



It would be impossible to travel down Lincoln Avenue without noticing the outstanding commercial building at No. 1530-1534. With its two storefronts and four upstairs apartments, it is one of the largest of the family-owned commercial buildings on Lincoln Avenue. The two street fronts are dominated by dramatic shaped gables with sheet metal cornices that accent the complex curves. The building is unusual and eye-catching because its curvaceous roofline is so visually prominent that the building has always been a local landmark. The gable end at the front of the building frames a bank of seven attic windows that are accented with stone sills and lintels, and below them are projecting oriel windows on the second story. Unlike most buildings of its age, the storefronts on the first floor retain much of their original appearance.

The striking building was commissioned by Michal Wargin and designed by South Side architect Stanley Kadow. Kadow was born in Germany in 1868 and, when less than a year old, came to the United States with his parents, who settled in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. As a young man, Kadow moved to Milwaukee, and, after a brief stint as a bookkeeper, became an apprentice with Ferry & Clas, one of the city's most prestigious architectural firms. He opened his own practice in 1894. Typical of the many small architectural firms in Milwaukee, Kadow practiced primarily in a particular neighborhood, in this instance the

South Side, and produced designs for houses, commercial buildings, and movie theaters. Over 80 of his commissions were executed in the Bay View neighborhood where he lived, but Kadow is known to have designed at least six buildings in the Lincoln Ave. area. Generalizations about his work are hard to make since most of his known projects have been substantially remodeled, but Kadow designed solid, well-built buildings until his death at the age of 67 in 1933. Kadow utilized the German Renaissance Revival style for the Wargin Building, which may be Kadow's most flamboyant design.

The building's owner, Michal Wargin, was born in Poland in 1869 and came to Milwaukee around 1891. He first lived on Mitchell St. where he plied his trade as a tailor before relocating to Lincoln Ave. in 1903 where he built a 1-story cottage with a storefront. After moving to this location, Wargin operated a dry goods shop, while his wife, Michalina, operated a millinery business. In 1914, as many Lincoln Ave. merchants were beginning to remodel or build new stores, Wargin had the present brick-veneered structure built on his lot to house two stores and four flats. Through 1921 the Wargins lived in one of the flats and used both storefronts, one for the dry goods shop and one for the millinery shop. In 1922 Wargin gave up his dry goods store to manage his wife's millinery shop, and the west storefront was turned over to Wargin's son-in-law, Frank E. Kozlowski, a pharmacist. Kozlowski moved out when he divorced Anna Wargin, and the storefront subsequently was tenanted by a fruit market (1925), a real estate office (1926-1933), and a hosiery store (1934-1944). Wargin continued to operate the millinery shop in the east storefront after Michalina died at the age of 59 in 1937, until he himself passed away at the age of 72 in 1942. Daughter Anna Kozlowski, who had continued to live with her parents after her divorce, sold the building in 1945. Since that time the building has had a variety of commercial tenants including a music school, a beauty shop, a florist, a television sales and repair business, a floor covering store, and a grocery. ❖

## ETHNIC BUILDINGS TODAY

Milwaukee's German restaurants and some of its newest buildings continue the city's tradition of ethnic architecture with modern renditions of Old World forms.



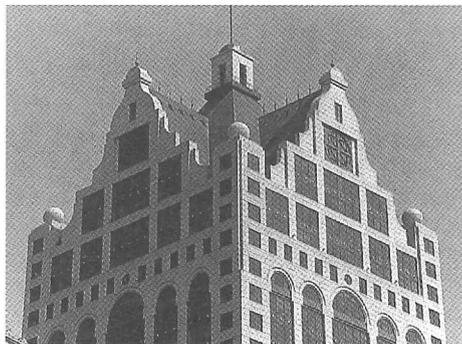
Port of Milwaukee Building, 2323 S. Lincoln Memorial Drive (1991)



Mader's German Restaurant,  
1037 Old World 3rd St. (1935)



John Ernst Restaurant,  
600 E. Ogden Ave. (1935)



100 E. Wisconsin/Faison Building, 100 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Built on the site of the Pabst Building. (1987-1989)

### Brochures in this series include:

- *Ethnic Church Tour*
- *Ethnic Houses Tour*
- *Ethnic Commercial and Public Buildings Tour*

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