

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

ABBOT ROW

(Written in December, 1983)

I. NAME

Historic: Edwin H. Abbot Apartments

Common: Abbot Row

II. LOCATION

Street Address: 1019-1043 East Ogden Avenue

Legal Property Description: Partition of the East Half of SW ¼ Section 21-7-22, Block 17 all and E 7.57' Block 18.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Site

IV. OWNER

Name: Abbot Row Corporation
c/o Sarah Dean
1041 East Ogden Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

V. DESCRIPTION

Abbot Row is a 2 1/2 –story, brick-veneered building comprising ten residences built in the Queen Ann style. It measures approximately 210 feet long and 62 feet deep. It is located on the street front half of the parcel with a common yard or park at the rear.

The façade of the row has five single-story porches, each serving two units, windows of diverse sizes and shapes and numerous shingled gabled roofs and dormers. The overall appearance of the façade is one of symmetry with a tall central gable, featuring a third-story oriel window, flanked by mirror image facades. However, upon closer inspection it is noted that beyond the middle pair of houses no two facades are identical in their fenestration, brickwork and trim details. The rear or south façade is strikingly different in appearance with its five identical gabled, 2 ½-story wings. As in front, five porches serve the rear entrances. Excepting the replacement of two third-story windows on the street side of the row and a couple of windows on the rear façade, there have been no structural alterations to the building. The cream brick exterior, however, is now painted gray with black and white trim. Recently, combination storm and screen doors for the front entrances were built, having been patterned after the original ones.

The unusual landscape arrangement of the lot accommodates both private and common spaces. Ten private, landscaped patios and gardens adjacent to the rear of the residences

are bounded by fences and a drive that continues around both sides of the building to intersect with Ogden Avenue. South of the drive the common yard or park, as it is now called, occupies the southern third of the parcel on which the row stands. Its extensive lawn is surrounded by a border of trees, shrubs and a fence. An unusual feature in the western third of the park is the flat-topped square terrace rising three feet above the rest of the park. A summerhouse, demolished in 1927, once stood there – perhaps a remnant of the period when Bielfeld’s Beer Garden occupied the site.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

Date Built: 1889¹

Architect/Builder: Howland Russel,²
George P. and Peter E. Posson, builders

National Register of Historic Places (determined eligible, 1977)

Milwaukee Landmark, 1979

Architecture

Abbot Row is significant as an excellent preserved example of a Queen Anne Style row house block in Milwaukee. Among the other row house blocks that remain in Milwaukee, only a few can compare with Abbot Row in the excellence of design. Two of the finest exhibit elements of the Richardsonian Romanesque style: these two are the five-unit row (1890-91) at 1527-43 North Cass Street and Graham Row (1887) at 1501-07 North Marshall Street.³ Another fine example of 1620-28 North Farwell, an asymmetrical Queen Anne block of six brick dwellings. This latter row bears some resemblance to Abbot Row in plan and in details, but is somewhat deteriorated.

Blocks such as these represented a departure from traditional row house design of the preceding decades of the nineteenth century where each unit was identifiable as a discrete entity in a row of identical units. The only remaining example in Milwaukee of this more familiar row house type is the Abel Decker Row at 408-10 South Third Street. In contrast, blocks such as Abbot Row present the unified appearance of a single structure without accentuating on the exterior divisions between the units. The fact that all of the blocks of this type were built for a single owner as multiple rental units, rather than for sale as individual dwellings may have contributed to the acceptance of this building type.

Historical Background

Abbot Row was built in 1889 by Wisconsin Central Rail Road Company Vice President, Edwin Hale Abbot. He built it on the land he bought in 184 that had served as Bielfeld’s Beer Garden

¹ *Evening Wisconsin*, March 23, 1889, p.2.
Milwaukee Sentinel, March 23, 1889, p.3.

² Building permits and other records 1889-1975, General Office, Department of Building Inspection and Safety Engineering, 1010 Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, Milwaukee.

³ Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

from the late 1850's until 1883.⁴ Reportedly he bought the old establishment that was adjacent to his own home on Knapp Street in order to silence the nightly revelry.⁵

In developing the row, Abbot commissioned prominent Milwaukee architect Howland Russel with whose work he was familiar. Five years earlier, Russel and Abbot had both served as officers of the Associated Charities, a service organization whose membership included many of Milwaukee's elite.⁶

Howland Russel's architectural career in Milwaukee that spanned the period from 1880-1916 included primarily residential commissions.⁷ One residence he designed in the Queen Anne style, though with more restraint than he exercised in Abbot Row, is the Hathaway-Brumder House (1887) at 2105 East Lafayette Place, built by the Posson brothers who later built Abbot Row.⁸ Russel is perhaps better known for his later commissions such as the Edward Diedrichs House at 1241 North Franklin Place, remodeled by Russel in 1895 in the Neo-Classical style, and the Hawley-Bloodgood residences (1896) in the Chateausque style at 1249 Franklin Place and 1139 Knapp Street,⁹ all of which are in the immediate vicinity of Abbot Row.

Abbot Row was originally built as rental townhouses. Throughout its history, the row's occupants have been a cross section of prosperous businessmen and professionals. Tenants in the 1890's included: James K. Ilsley then a cashier with M & I Banks; Louis Allis then a purchasing agent with the Edward P. Allis Co.; and Reverend Judson Titsworth, minister of the Plymouth Congregation Church. In 1924 the row was sold by Abbot's widow to the Abbot Row Corporation as cooperative housing. This is significant because Abbot Row was probably the first cooperative in Milwaukee and one of the first in Wisconsin after the passage of the state cooperative housing law in 1921. It may be the oldest functioning cooperative housing association in Milwaukee. Prominent Milwaukee attorneys, Edmund B. Shea and Malcolm Whyte (both Abbot Row residents), negotiated the transaction. This act probably prevented the row from being converted to a rooming house or small apartments, as were so many residences of well-known Milwaukeeans. Later tenants, now called shareholders, were N. Rulison Knox who was to become vice-chairman of the Board of Bucyrus-Erie; William A. Norris, a lead reporter for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*; and numerous executives and agents of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. A long time resident of over fifty years was James P. Brown, a real estate agent. Brown moved into the row shortly after it was built and after his death his wife, Nora and daughter, Dorothy, lived in the same unit until the mid-1930's.

⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 3, 1884, p. 3

⁵ *Exclusively Yours*, January 1961, p. 5.

⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 25, 1884, p. 3.

⁷ City directories

⁸ McArthur, Shirley du Fresne, *North Point Historical Districts – Milwaukee*. North Point Historical Society, Milwaukee, 1981.

⁹ Zimmerman, H. Russell, *The Heritage Guidebook, Landmarks and Historical Sites in Southeastern Wisconsin*, Heritage Banks Inland Heritage Corporation, Milwaukee, 1976.

VII. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principle 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. These guidelines shall be applicable only to Abbot Row. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roof

1. Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar panels may be added to the south elevation if they do not visually intrude upon the other elevations. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, pitch or gable orientation.
2. Avoid using new roofing materials that are inappropriate to the style and period of the building.

B. Openings

Retain the location and style of window and door openings and the number and configuration of panes that are visible from the public right-of-way, except restoration to the original condition is encouraged in the case where the fenestration has been altered. Replacement and repair materials shall resemble the original in color, texture and dimensions so that the appearance of the building is not altered. Avoid making additional openings or changes in the principal elevations by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or the installation of plastic or metal strip awnings or fake shutters that are historically out of character with the building. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

C. Additions

Because of the design and siting of the building, the north or Ogden Avenue elevation is the most significant to the structure's architectural integrity. Additions are not recommended. However, any approved additions must be confined to the rear or south elevation and be designed in such a way so as not to visually intrude on the north elevation. The design of additions should be compatible with the original structure in massing, scale, proportions, materials and color.

D. Porches and Trim

1. Retain porches, steps and trim that are visible from the public right-of-way. Avoid enclosing open porches and the indiscriminate removal of trim such as window or door moldings that are essential to the maintenance of the building's historic character and appearance.

2. Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using replacement materials that do not accurately reproduce the appearance of the original material.

E. Exterior Finishes

1. Retain painted masonry surfaces. Removal of paint could cause irreversible damages to the masonry. If it is decided to remove the paint from masonry surfaces, use the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick or stone 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 masonry materials, such as the use of acid or limestone. Avoid tuckpointing deteriorated mortar with pointing styles that were unavailable or not used when the building was constructed. Avoid covering masonry surfaces with materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial cast stone or fake brick veneer.
2. Retain wooden shingles on wall surfaces and gable ends. Repair or replace deteriorated shingles with new ones that duplicate the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering shingles with materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed such as artificial stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles, vinyl or aluminum siding.

F. Site

The site includes the common front yard, the private rear yards, the common driveway and the park. Avoid the indiscriminate removal of landscape features that would detract from the period, appearance of the building. New plantings, especially in the front, should be compatible with the existing traditional landscape scheme. Avoid changes in the park area what would have an adverse impact on the site or visually intrude upon the historic character of the building.