

FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

DANIEL H. RICHARDS HOUSE

I. NAME

Historic: Daniel H. Richards House

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

2863 North First Street

Tax Key Number: 313-1354-000

Legal Property Description: S.A. Richards Addition in NE ¼ SEC 17-1-22 Block 5 W 70'
(Lots 21 and 22)

6th Aldermanic District – Alderwoman Marlene Johnson Odom

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Patrick Moore
2611 North Terrace Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

V. YEAR BUILT

Between 1836 and 1841

Architect: (probably not architect-designed)

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Daniel H. Richards House is a rectangular, Greek Revival style house situated at the crest of a large hill between today's North First and North Second Streets. Since the widening of Locust Street, the house is visible from that thoroughfare. Although the house was originally located near the center of the 160 acre quarter section that Richards acquired in 1841, later subdivisions have obscured all traces of the original Richards farm and resulted in the house's awkward siting behind a row of traditional bungalows and fronting west onto an alley. North First Street, located to the east of the house, ends in a cul-de-sac and is lined by well-tended bungalows, mostly from the 1920's. North Second Street to the west and down the hill from the Richards house features houses dating mostly from the 1890's to the turn of the century.

The Richards House, as indicated above, is a simple, rectangular, gabled roofed structure on a fieldstone foundation whose main elevation faces west. Two rectangular windows are

located on each of the two stories. To the north is a small, single story shed lean-to which features three windows and a door on its north front and a door on its east elevation through which one enters the building. Two square windows are located at the second story of this elevation and appear to be replacement sash dating to the early twentieth century. At the south side of the house is a one-story wing that has a door on its west elevation and two windows on its south front. The east or rear elevation of the building is of simple design with a sash window on the upper story and a large modern window on the first. Many of the windows are currently broken and/or boarded up. A basement is located below the two-story portion of the house and has a dirt floor. The two wings rest on stone foundations without a basement.

The Richards House still retains its vernacular Greek Revival character through the retention of its shallow pitched gable roof and the small cornice returns visible on the west elevation. Alterations to the house consist of the replacement of the north wing (after 1923), the removal of the rear one-and-a-half story wing (between 1910 and 1926, probably 1923 when the east half of the parcel was sold off), fire damage to the south wing (1980's), and the application of two layers of asphalt siding the most recent of which was applied in 1957. Original 6-over-6 windows have also been replaced by one-over-one sash. Two detached one story sheds and a carriage barn located to the rear or east of the house and a carriage barn located to the north were removed between 1900 and 1926.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Daniel H. Richards House is significant as the oldest documented structure still extant from Milwaukee's pioneer settlement days. There are no structures that can be conclusively dated to the 1830's and currently only six known buildings in Milwaukee that can be documented from the 1840's. The Richards House predates them all: The Benjamin Church House (now located in Estabrook Park, c. 1844); the Alanson Sweet Doublehouse (1216 South First Street, 1845); the Stoddard Martin House (418 South 4th Street, 1845-46); the George F. Austin House (now located at 1750 North Humboldt Avenue, c. 1847); and, the Layton House Hotel (2504 West Forest Home Avenue, 1849). A seventh example, the Frederick Kessler House at 1527 North Cass Street (c. 1847) has recently been demolished for new construction.

The Richards House is also significant as one of the few examples of the Greek Revival style in Milwaukee. While the style was popular both in high style and vernacular renditions it was a style that was already beginning to wane back east by the time Milwaukee was first settled and was soon supplanted here by the Federal and Italianate styles. Examples that can be found today are concentrated in the Walker's Point and Lower East Side neighborhoods and none survive in their original condition.

The Richards House is also historically significant as the long time residence of Daniel Richards, the editor of the city's first newspaper, investor, and political figure who was much admired and respected in his day. The Richards family continued to own the property until 1915 and occupied the residence until 1919 maintaining most of the hilltop site as a garden, a last vestige of the once rural character of the neighborhood.

VIII. HISTORY

Daniel Hamilton Richards (2/12/1808 - 2/6/1877) was born in Burlington, Otsego County, New York, and learned the printer's trade in Canada at age 16. He subsequently opened a general store near Peoria, Illinois in the spring of 1835 and, following a brief stay in Chicago, came to Milwaukee on December 15, 1835 where he settled permanently. Historian James Buck

describes him as "tall and commanding" having a "large head, light hair, blue eyes, [and] a strong powerful voice". Like many of his contemporaries who sought to make a community out of the wilderness, Richards became involved with many activities of the new community and is best remembered as being one of the founders and editors of the city's first newspaper, the *Milwaukee Advertiser*, from the period 1836 to 1841. Richards started out handling the paper's mechanical and business end of the weekly publication but soon became its editor. In 1841 the paper was bought out by Josiah Noonan and eventually became the prominent daily known as the *Evening Wisconsin*.

Following his "retirement to private life" (at the age of 33) as the *Sentinel* described it, Richards became involved in numerous investments such as the Milwaukee and Rock River Canal, the Milwaukee and Horicon Railroad and the Berlin and Lake Superior Railroad none of which made him any money but actually almost ruined him financially. More successful was his political career, serving as an assessor and then state assemblyman in the 1860's and 1870's. He was described as "an uncompromising Democrat dyed in the wool but all in all "a good legislator".

Deeds indicate that Richards purchased nearly a quarter section from Morgan L. Burdick in 1841 for \$800, a parcel that is bounded by today's Center Street, Burleigh Street, Richards Street and a portion of the block between 5th and 6th Streets. It is not clear whether or not Burdick had a structure on the site before selling to Richards although Burdick's homestead, as related in the histories, was located in the Town of Lake on today's south side. The house that survives today at 2863 North First Street was most likely built by Richards after giving up his career at the *Milwaukee Advertiser* and purchasing this property. He chose the crest of a hill some 150 feet above the level of Lake Michigan, one of the highest elevations in the city, to build his residence. The house was of vernacular Greek Revival design and consisted of a two-story center portion with shallow pitched roof and cornice returns which was flanked on either side by one story wings with recessed porches. Clapboarding covered the exterior. A spacious story-and-a-half wing extended from the rear. Fire insurance maps show two small sheds, a large barn and a small barn were once located to the east and north of the house.

Richards made this property his home for 36 years, farming some of the land, but also selling off portions over the years. Here he raised his sons, Alonzo H. and Charles Dana, and a daughter, Sarah H., who worked as a teacher for the Milwaukee Public Schools beginning in 1872. The 1860 census also shows other children and young adults at the house: Arthur B. (age 20), Frank B. (age 18), Henry B. (age 11), Sarah H. (age 7) and Emma D. (age 9). At the time of his death from paralysis on February 6, 1877 just sort of his 69th birthday, Richards was known to have been "gardening" his land. Richards' wife at the time of his death was Sarah H. Dana, the sister of his first wife, Eliza Ann Dana, who died some years before. Richards' funeral took place at his home and was attended by members of the Old Settlers Club.

Widow Sarah H. Richards subsequently subdivided what remained of the homestead in 1882, an area bounded by Richards Street to the east, Third Street (King Drive) to the west, Locust to the north and a point located 13 lots south of Locust to the south, approximately 84 lots altogether. The house itself straddled two lots and Sarah conveyed these to her 35-year old son Charles Dana Richards along with the adjacent lots atop the hill and the two lots sloping west toward Second Street in front of the house. A 1909 biography of Charles indicated that he had attended Milwaukee's Second Ward school and left at the age of 18 to help work in his father's garden which was described as "a beautiful garden situated on an elevation that overlooks the entire city." Widow Sarah and her daughter Sarah H. moved to a different house on First Street near North Avenue in 1883 and son Alonzo moved off the homestead to live on Palmer, then later Garfield Street, nearby. Widow Sarah A. Richards died in 1891 and the

younger Sarah then moved in with another family member, Harry B. Richards. Charles and his wife, Eliza Lee, raised four children, Frank B., Charles D. Jr., Henry B. and William L., at the old homestead. Sons, Frank B., a carpenter, and William L., an attorney, remained at the house into adulthood. Charles, like his father, was a Democrat and served as alderman from the thirteenth ward from 1883 to 1888. By 1909 houses were being constructed along the east side of Second Street down the hill from the Richards homestead, although the family retained frontage on Second Street. A few houses were built along First Street close to Locust Street, but Charles retained two lots on the east side of First Street directly in back of (east) of his residence as well as the lots along the top of the hill to the south on what would be the west side of the 1800 block of North First Street today.

Financial reversals or failing health may explain why Charles, now 68, lost ownership of the homestead in December of 1915 at a sheriff's sale that resulted in Lina Schlichter acquiring the property. In January of 1916 William L. filed an option agreement to purchase the property back from Lina Schlichter for \$4,000 and interest, but records seem to indicate that the Richards' never regained title to the remains of the old homestead. Schlichter subsequently quitclaimed the property to Max Franz who lost it at a sheriff's foreclosure auction in February of 1919. City directories show that Charles D. and his sons, Frank B. and William L., continued to live on the premises through 1918. Charles Dana Richards died on July 31, 1918 of cancer following the amputation of one of his arms. Thereafter Frank B. and William L. are no longer listed as living in the house and disappear from the directories thus ending a 77-year occupancy of the house by members of the Richards family.

Subsequent owners included Integrity Savings Buildings and Loan (1919 to 1922) and Louis and Edith Hicks (1922 to 1923). The Hicks' subdivided the parcel on which the Richards House stands, the east 80 feet going to Gustav and Ruby Mueller and the west 70 feet with the old house being sold to Frank R. Richardson and his wife, Eva. Richardson, an employee of the Chicago North Western Railway, lived in the old homestead through 1926. In 1927 city directories show Carl Butenhoff on the premises, possibly a tenant who occupied the building on a short term basis. The Richardson's sold the building to Louis and Alice Larson in June of 1927 and their long tenure in the house lasted until the mid-to-late 1940's. Frank and Norma Schwenk purchased the premises from the Larson's in December of 1947 and occupied/owned the building in the 1950's through the 1970's. Widow Norma Schwenk sold the house to Calvin and Barbara Pooler in 1976 Calvin Pooler retained title to the property after his divorce from Barbara in 1983. The City of Milwaukee later acquired the property on tax deed by which time significant deterioration had set in due to vandalism and decades of deferred maintenance.

The Richards House today is owned by Patrick Moore who purchased the building from the City of Milwaukee. Gone are the various outbuildings once located in the vicinity of the house; the large barn was taken down between 1894 and 1909 and the smaller sheds and rear wing were probably removed in 1923 when the property was divided into east and west portions. A one-story lean-to replaced the original north wing at some undetermined time after the *Milwaukee Journal* took a photo of the house in 1923. Two layers of asphalt siding cover the original clapboards and the current windows appear to be replacements for the original six-over-six sash. An alley has been cut through right up to the front wall of the building. Despite all the years of neglect and insensitive alterations, however, the Richards House still retains enough of its original "bone structure" to tell us about the construction techniques and life styles of our pioneer forefathers.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Daniel H. Richards House at 2863 North First Street be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its possible fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-3 and e-5 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-1. Its exemplification of the development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.
- e-3. Is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Milwaukee.
- e-5. Its embodiment of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type of specimen.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

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

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape. Skylights may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roof line or pitch. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roofing as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Wood

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

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of window panes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing that have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and that obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
2. Respect existing window and door openings. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of original openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. Vinyl or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block basement windows are not permitted, except on the rear elevation, where they may be allowed in locations where they will not be visible from the street.

3. Exterior mounted steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

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

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the west elevation. Any other addition requires the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right-of-way. The non-historic west lean-to may be removed if the west elevation is restored to its original appearance.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

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

G. Site Features

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

H. Guidelines for New Construction

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

1. Siting

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

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building if they are in close proximity to it.

3. Form

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

4. Materials

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

I. Guidelines for Demolition

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

1. Condition

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

2. Importance

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

3. Location

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

4. Potential for Restoration

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

5. Additions

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