

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

PABST BREWERY TAVERN

(Written Fall, 1997)

I. NAME

Historic: Pabst Brewery Tavern

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

Street Address: 3431 W. Vliet Street

Tax Key Number: 365-0072-000

Legal Property Description: COLD SPRING PARK IN SE ¼ SEC 24-7-21 BLOCK 8 W 27' OF N 115.6" LOT 1

16th Aldermanic District – Alderman Paul Henningsen

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

John Massruha, Land Contract Holder
2846 S. Wentworth Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53207

Clara Barthel, Title Holder
7066 N. 55th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53233

V. YEAR BUILT

Permit taken out May 31, 1907

Architect: George Ehlers

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The building at 3431-33 W. Vliet Street is a rectangular, 2-story, flat roofed commercial structure of eclectic design with elements of the German Renaissance Revival. The building occupies most of its site and is built up to the west and north lot lines with some clearance along the east property line and paved parking at the rear or south end of the property. The solid masonry building is clad with tan pressed brick on its principal north (Vliet Street) and west (35th Street) elevations and common brick is used at the south (rear) and east facades.

In keeping with its post-Victorian construction date and with Pabst's emphasis on quality buildings, the structure is not overly embellished, but makes use of various details to emphasize its form. Stone belt courses and brick corbelling divide the first and second stories and define the parapet area. The entrance is located at the canted corner and is highlighted at the roofline by a parapet in which is situated a medallion with the Pabst logo. To either side of the entrance are located large storefront windows. Additional

openings on the first story include an entrance to the upper flat at the far east end of the Vliet Street façade and two additional storefront windows and a back entrance along the 35th Street elevation. The upper story features various 1-over-1 sash as well as one Chicago style window on the Vliet Street façade. The east elevation is windowless except for a small light well notched into the structure. The south or rear elevation features a doorway and window on the first level and three 1-Over-1 sash on the second. A striking feature on the principle facades is a series of ornamental tile-clad pent roofs supported by brackets. These roofs along with a shallow niche at the west elevation lend a vaguely Mediterranean look to the building today although historic photographs show that the building originally was more German in character.

Alterations to the building have been concentrated mainly at the parapet. Historic photographs show that the piers between the pent roofs once projected well beyond the roofs and were embellished with small pedestals topped with ball finials. On the 35th Street elevation the niche was once topped with a keystone and gable. A shaped gable once framed the Pabst logo and a second shaped gable was centered over the Vliet Street façade. These features lent the building a more German character than it has today. Permit records show that defective parapet wall were “repaired” in 1954. Other alterations include the enlarging of the storefront windows in 1928 and the subsequent blocking up of some of the windows. A large opening crowned with a keystone on the 35th Street façade was blocked in with brick already by 1937 when city engineers photographed the intersection. Other windows and entrances have been blocked up in recent years with plywood. The historic photographs also show that a canopy supported by ornamental metal brackets was once located above the entry. Permit records do not document major alterations to the interior although the first story did have a number of tenants over time and the upper flat had been converted to rooming house use in the 1930’s. The building is currently vacant.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Pabst tavern is significant as one of only a handful or corner Pabst taverns still extant in Milwaukee and is among the last examples of the great saloon building era that ended in Milwaukee in 1907. From the 1880’s to 1907 Milwaukee’s leading breweries went all out in competition for outlet sites with the result that in many neighborhoods, especially near factories or manufacturers, taverns could be found at each corner of an intersection. While Pabst was the leading Milwaukee brewery from the late 1960’s through the turn of the century, it lagged behind Schlitz in local tavern construction. The result is that today we have any number of Schlitz taverns and even examples of the more modest Miller taverns, but only a few remaining from the Pabst Brewery. Pabst concentrated on better quality structures and better-placed structures and relied more heavily on advertising than its competitors. The few, but more prominent, examples of Pabst taverns included such memorable structures as the castellated Empire Building at the corner of North Plankinton and West Wisconsin Avenue and the German Renaissance Revival tavern adjacent to Turner Hall, both of which have been razed. Still extant are the castellated former saloon, now church, at 1338-40 West Juneau Avenue and the structure that now houses Bartolotta’s Ristorante at 7616 West State Street in Wauwatosa, which represent the flamboyant high point of Pabst’s tavern design.

The building at 3431-33 West Vliet shows a departure from this more flamboyant style in keeping with the company’s fiscal conservatism after the turn of the century and its fall from first to third largest brewery in the country and the changing architectural taste toward more sober looking structures. The Vliet Street structure is nonetheless finely designed and unique among the few known extant examples of Pabst taverns by its use of such details as the tile pent roofs and the round-headed arch on the west elevation as well as the now removed distinctive shaped gables and lively finials that reflect the influence of German architecture. Pabst in his 4th Street saloon next to Turner Hall and his mansion on Wisconsin Avenue did much to popularize the German Renaissance Revival style in the city and it was a natural progression for the style to be used for other brewery outlets as well. The year that the Vliet Street tavern was built, 1907, would prove to be the watershed year for brewery-built saloons. In that year the Baker Law was enacted prohibiting the granting of further saloon licenses until Milwaukee would reach a population of 500,000, a figure that would not be reached until after 1919 when Prohibition was in effect. The construction of new saloons was effectively stopped and breweries like Pabst would never again engage in the practice of building their own outlets.

The Pabst Brewery tavern on Vliet Street is also significant as one of only a handful of known commercial structures designed by the architect George Ehlers. Staff surveys have turned up a number of front gabled duplexes, Colonial Revival residence and Craftsman style houses designed by Ehlers in addition to a large Queen Anne style storefront and the Miramar Theater, but no other tavern buildings. Ehlers is best known for the lavish Goldberg/Martin residence on Newberry Boulevard he designed while in partnership with John A. Moller.

VIII. HISTORY

Vliet Street has long been an important thoroughfare to the city and was laid out as the Milwaukee and Wauwatosa Plank Road in 1854. Investors included Dr. E.B. Wolcott, G.D. Dousman and A.O.T. Breed, each of whom owned land in this area. Eventually the plank road was renamed after its easternmost connection, Vliet Street, in honor of pioneer Garrett Vliet. For many decades Vliet Street formed the northern boundary of Cold Spring Park, a racecourse and sometimes fairgrounds that extended from 27th to 35th Streets south to Juneau Avenue. Cold Spring Park precluded commercial development along Vliet Street west of 27th Street although to the east could be found numerous businesses from bakeries to saloons. Thirty-fifth Street, once the western city limit, was residential in character. The entire area between 27th, 35th, Kilbourn and Vliet Streets was annexed by the city from the Town of Wauwatosa in 1883. Cold Spring Park was eventually platted for development in December of 1894 by owners Theodore and Marion Yates, heirs of the Wolcott estate, who lived nearby in what is the 2700 block of State Street today.

While house lots began selling soon after the Cold Spring Park subdivision was platted, the parcel at the southeast corner of 35th and Vliet Streets was cutoff from the rest of the subdivision by the railroad tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad (later the Milwaukee Road) and was not subdivided into small lots, but rather left as one large parcel targeted for commercial or industrial buyers. The first portion of this parcel was sold in 1898 to Francis Walsh and consisted of land adjacent to the railroad tracks off 35th Street. Mary Geiger purchased much of the remaining land in 1904 and 1905 and then sold off portions to buyers who constructed businesses on the site. The corner parcel, 115.6 feet by 27 feet, was purchased by Geiger from the Yates Estate on January 17, 1905 and she turned around and sold it to the Pabst Brewing Company three days later on January 20th.

This purchase by Pabst may have been motivated by the fact that a competitor, Miller Brewing Company, had just completed a new tavern building at the northwest corner of the intersection. While Miller Brewing was not a serious threat to Pabst, the nation's number three breweries at that time; there was still a healthy competition among the various breweries for choice corner lots at busy intersections. On these lots breweries would construct saloons, or taverns as we call them today, and then lease the premises to managers who would only sell that company's product. Sometimes real estate would be purchased and not developed just to keep competitors from acquiring the site. The Best Brewery, which would later be renamed after Frederick Pabst, opened its first "beer hall" in 1851 and added two more establishments by 1854, but the practice of purchasing property and erecting saloons would not become an important activity for the company until the 1870's. The growth in the Milwaukee brewing industry prompted by the Chicago fire, the high taxes imposed on hard liquor, and the growth in the number of consumers who worked in the burgeoning factories all led to a phenomenal 250% increase in beer consumption from the early 1870's to the early 1890's. Sales at the Best Brewery increased 800% from 1865 to 1873 alone and by 1895 Pabst, as the company was now known, was the largest brewery in the US with Anheuser-Busch in second place and Schlitz in third. In addition to thousands of dollars in advertising spent by Pabst each year in periodicals and newspapers, the company also exhibited at fairs and expositions and constructed eye-catching hotels and restaurants in New York, Chicago, Minneapolis and San Francisco as well as Milwaukee. Part of the marketing strategy included a network of "outlets" or saloons that would carry only Pabst beer. Like its competitors Schlitz or Miller or Jung, Pabst would contract with managers of existing saloons and often offer incentives in the way of discounts or new fixtures or refurbishing the saloonkeeper's building. By the mid-1880's problems obtaining good outlets led the various breweries, including Pabst, to start purchasing their own sites and then leasing them out to operators who would carry the owner's beer. Pabst historian

Thomas Cochran relates, "Competition for outlets, therefore, was probably keener among brewers than among other businessmen, and it was here that brewers spent most of their promotional money." Despite the new problems associated with the management and planning of real estate, however, Pabst in the 1880's began spending around \$20,000 per year in properties in Milwaukee that might be useful for retailing. By 1891 some \$500,000 was being invested in property from Omaha to Boston and by 1893 the company had spent some \$1,400,000 in land and buildings and \$300,000 in improvement. Records from 1893 indicate that the inventory of these properties was worth \$2,237,855.11, a sum representing 20% of the book value of the business.

Interestingly, despite these figures, Pabst lagged behind some of its local competitors in the number of outlets it owned locally. Schlitz had some 50 retail outlets plus a larger number of vacant lots in Milwaukee in 1887 for example, while Pabst had fewer than a dozen with only a few parcels of land. The number would increase, however, in the following decades and Cochran points out that 1899 marks the end of the company's large-scale real estate expansion. The number then dropped to around a dozen sites acquired per year and in 1910 the company had 428 selling properties in 187 cities. Cochran speculates that the reason Pabst lagged behind Schlitz in the number of local saloons built here may have been due to the company's emphasis on quality construction and design rather than volume. Cochran summarizes, "From the standpoint of direct profits, all this real estate was a poor investment. . . . On the average, these restaurants and hotels paid their way, but did not provide any large return on the capital investment and in themselves service as very large outlets for beer. . . . Pabst's investment in saloons, on the other hand, helped to sell beer. But it was an expensive way to do it . . . the net return on rents was . . . about 2 percent on the capital involved." Despite the low return, however, Pabst like its competitors would not have survived without the retail outlets.

By 1905 when Pabst purchased the lot at the corner of 35th and Vliet Streets the Company was no longer the number one brewery in the United States, but was still augmenting the number of retail outlets under its control. The property sat vacant for two years until a permit was taken out on May 31, 1907 to construct the \$9,000 building that now occupies the site. George Ehlers was the architect of record and it is not known if he had other commissions from the brewery. Other architects who designed saloon buildings for Pabst include Otto Strack and Charles G. Hoffman. From historic photographs the Vliet Street saloon with its lively finials and shaped gables and tile pent roofs is reminiscent of other German style structures that were built in Milwaukee between 1890 and World War I. Its unique character certainly made it more of a visual landmark than the rather modest Miller tavern at the opposite corner. Pabst's Vliet Street tavern can be viewed as a symbol of the end of the great age of the brewery-built saloon and would have been one of the last constructed in the city. In 1907 in response to the ever-growing number of saloons, the Baker Law was enacted that prohibited the granting of further saloon licenses until Milwaukee's population would reach 500,000, a number that would not be reached until after 1919 and Prohibition.

The Vliet Street tavern would remain under Pabst ownership until Prohibition. Unlike many taverns that had a high turnover in proprietors, this property had stable management in its early years, first under Henry L. Genz (1908-1916) then Frank F. Kafehl (1916-1919). Both men lived with their families in the upper flat. Genz went on to open the Marquardt-Genz Garage and Kafehl became a deputy sheriff. With the onset of Prohibition all the breweries scrambled to either divest themselves of their real estate holdings or to find new occupants for their former saloons. On January 20, 1920 Pabst entered into a lease with Phoenix Knitting Works, a company that manufactured hosiery in today's Historic Third Ward. Phoenix occupied the building as a "branch" through 1924 and records are not clear whether or not the building was used for retail, storage or manufacturing purposes. The brewery transferred the property to the Pabst Realty Company on December 21, 1920 and in the following year on December 19, 1921 the realty company transferred the property to Ventnor Corporation, which was comprised of various members of the Pabst family. Later owners during the Prohibition years included Robert Warg (1923-1929) and Nettie DeGrasse (1929-).

After the expiration of the lease with Phoenix Knitting tenancy in the Vliet Street building was sporadic until 1934. Anton Schiller operated a soft drink parlor on the premises in 1925, as did Henry Laschen in

1927. Benjamin Roska ran a pharmacy here in 1929 and in 1931 Nettie DeGrasse leased the building to the adjacent business, Richards Badger Packard Company for office use. Edward J. Froncek operated a pharmacy here again in 1933. In the Intervening years the storefront stood vacant. With the repeal of Prohibition the building was once again leased out for tavern purposed beginning with Harold Eggert in 1934. The building remained a tavern thereafter under the proprietorship of Harold Eggert (1934-1939), Leonard Lagrange (1940), George C. Schubert (1941-1953/54), Edwin Wojciechowski (1955-1956), Eugene A. Barthel (1957-1984, first a Lu-Gene's then as Ce-Gene's), Richard born (1985-1988 as Mark's Place) and Dwight and Katherine Maynor (1989-1990 as Why Go By). Since the early 1990's the building has been vacant. Clara Barthel, widow of Eugene Barthel, is currently the titleholder of the property and John Massruha has had a land contract on the property since 1984. The building is in the process of being sold at the present time.

Architect

Not much research has been done on local architect George C. Ehlers and his commissions. He first appears in the city directories as a clerk in 1880 and was residing with family members Charles (teamster) and Henry (mason) at 2153 North 5th Street. Ehlers began his architectural career in 1881 as a draftsman with architect James Douglas and spent 1887 and 1888 studying architecture at Cornell University. He was subsequently employed in Buffalo, New York and then Boston, Massachusetts and then returned to Milwaukee where he worked for the prestigious firm of Ferry and Clas who were designing the Pabst mansion at the time, among other projects. After a two-year period as assistant Building Inspector with the City of Milwaukee in 1893 and 1894, Ehlers formed a partnership with John A. Moller as Moller & Ehlers. Moller, like Ehlers, was a Milwaukee native and had commissions in Minneapolis, Omaha and Portland, Oregon before establishing this partnership in 1895. The two men went on to design the Lange Block in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin as well as the Johnston Emergency Hospital among other commissions. Probably their best know project was the elaborate Gothic Revival style Goldberg/Martin mansion on Newberry Boulevard. The partnership dissolved around 1898 and Ehlers practiced on his own thereafter sometimes working out of his house or out of an office on today's King Drive. The Historic Preservation Commission staff surveys have turned up a number of buildings designed by Ehlers, mostly duplexes and residences and a few commercial structures, none as flamboyant as the Newberry Boulevard mansion. The Vliet Street Pabst tavern is his only known tavern commission to date. Ehlers died at the age of 50 on December 29, 1915.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Pabst Brewery Saloon at 3431-33 West Vliet Street be studied for possible designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its possible fulfillment of criteria e-1 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-1. Its exemplification of the development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.
- e-5. Its embodiment of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

X. 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. 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 original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. Retain the historic roofing materials on the building if at all possible, but if replacement of the tile roofing is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roof as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the originals in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and 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 the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or marble.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as aluminum or vinyl siding or artificial cast stone or fake brick veneer.

2. Wood

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid the removal of architectural features that are in most cases an essential part of the building's character and appearance.
- b. Repair 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 are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed such as artificial stone, vinyl or aluminum siding or composition panels.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain original window and door openings that are visible from the public right-of-way. Retain the present configuration of panes, sash, lintels, sills, architraves, hoods, doors and hardware, except as necessary to restore the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in the principle elevations by enlarging or reducing window or door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash. Avoid discarding original windows, doors, and door hardware when they can be repaired or reused.
2. Respect the stylistic period a building represents. If the replacement of window sash or doors is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the

original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements such as unpainted galvanized aluminum store and screen window combinations. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with materials like glass block or the installation of shutters. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of casement sash or the substitution of units with glazing configuration 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 readily 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 shall 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 condition and shall match the original member in scale, design, color and material.

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the north or west elevations because they are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Any other addition will require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the additions design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right-of-way.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light fixture with the historic and architectural character of the building.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, paving, fencing or accessory structures, such as a garage, 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 so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the structure.

1. Siting

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

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation; body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and

fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the building.

3. Form

The massing of the new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the building as a distinct freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede 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 that 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 historic structure. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

I. Guidelines for Demolition

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

1. Condition

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

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historic 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.