

HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDY REPORT

GEORGE W. PECK ROWHOUSE

(Written Spring, 1998)

I. NAME

Historic: George W. Peck Rowhouse

Common: Peck Rowhouse

II. LOCATION

1620-28 North Farwell Avenue

3rd Aldermanic District

Tax Key Number: 359-0218-000 X

Legal Property Description: ROBERS' ADD'N IN SE ¼ SEC 21-7-22 VOL 1 P 40 BLOCK 198 HAT PART LOT 12 COM NELY L1 & 50' SELY OF MOST NLY COR SD LOT-TH SELY ALG NELY L1 SD LOT 121.53' M/L-TH SWLY 6'-TH NWLY 2.21'-TH SWLY 117.70' M/L TO SWLY L1 SD LOT TH NWLY ALG SD SWLY L1 119.32'-TH NELY 122.70' TO BEG

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNERS

Mark and Terry Kivley
4797 North Woodburn Street
Whitefish Bay, WI 53211

Kivley Investments
4797 North Woodburn Street
Whitefish Bay, WI 53211

V. YEAR BUILT

1883

Architect: Unknown

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Peck's Row is a rambling, rectangular, 2-1/2 story, brick and wood shingled, multi-gabled Queen Anne style rowhouse. The principle elevation facing northwest on North Farwell Avenue is asymmetrically composed of six gabled bays that project from a hip-roofed block. The first story brick veneered and the second and attic stories are clad with ornamental wooden shingling. The front elevation is enlivened with dormers, box bays, three small projecting porches, ornamental brickwork on the chimney, and Queen Anne style ornamental woodwork that includes bracketing beneath the eaves and jig-sawn panel work.

A small, projecting porch shelters each of the three regularly placed entry doors. The most ebullient of the three porches is nearly centered on the front elevation and features a fine, Queen Anne style jig-sawn ornamental panel in the gable. A soaring chimney topped with outstanding ornamental brick corbelling projects from the front elevation and visually separates the second and third southernmost units. Most of the randomly placed double-hung windows that fenestrate the front elevation retain their original multi-pane Queen Anne style top sash.

The side elevations facing northeast and southwest are simple in character and composed of the original, 1883 hip-roofed block and a rear, flat roofed, 2-story, vernacular, frame addition constructed prior to 1888, which literally doubled the size of the structure. The addition, which is clad with substitute siding, is easily distinguishable from the original, finely finished brick and wood shingled main block of the building. The side elevations are simply articulated with randomly placed windows and doors that respond to the needs of the interior. The rear elevation, which is composed entirely of the 1880s frame addition, is utilitarian in character and features regularly placed windows and doors.

Over the years, some relatively minor alterations have been made to the publicly visible elevations of the buildings, such as the painting of the brick veneer on the first story, the removal of some original woodwork from the three front porches, and a few of the original multi-paned Queen Anne style sash have been replaced with single pane window sash.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

In terms of its architectural significance, Peck's Row is the city's finest and best preserved, early 1880s Queen Anne style rowhouse. As a building type, the rowhouse is an "endangered species" in Milwaukee with fewer than a dozen remaining examples. The building is also historically significant as the residence of its original owner, George W. Peck, who was a writer, newspaper publisher, Milwaukee Mayor and Wisconsin Governor. Three Hollywood films made in the 1920s and '30s were based on Peck's nationally acclaimed, 1883 book, *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa*, which chronicled the fictional antics of a young boy.

Historical Background

In the context of the Milwaukee's surviving rowhouse architecture, Peck's Row ranks as one of the best and least altered. Although many rowhouses were believed to have been built in Milwaukee during the nineteenth century, only a few of these structures survive today.

Broadly speaking, a rowhouse is defined as three or more contiguous, single-family units that are each two or more stories in height and united under a common roof. During the nineteenth century, the rowhouse became the stock-in-trade of residential architecture in many of the nation's bustling, big eastern cities where buildable land was often scarce.

The rowhouse was never a mainstay of residential architecture in Milwaukee, although research indicates that many rowhouses were built early in the city's history from the 1840s to about 1875 and that the peak years of construction were during the 1850s and 1860s. During the 1880s and '90s the construction of new rowhouses slowed to a great extent and then virtually ceased by about 1900 due to social and economic factors in the city that favored the construction of detached, duplex and single family housing. Rowhouses were concentrated east of the Milwaukee River in the city's central business district, but virtually all of those structures have been demolished. In recent years there has been a modest revival of rowhouse architecture in Milwaukee with new, modern style examples being erected at 902-904 N. Cass Street and 806-814 E. Kilbourn Avenue (1983) and 1000-1014 E. Lyon Street (1988).

Two of the city's oldest surviving remnants of rowhouse architecture include the Alanson Sweet House (1845) located at 1216 S. 1st Street and the Newhall Row (1850) at 609 W. Virginia St. Only one unit of the Sweet House survives today, but this simple two-story, side-gabled block is a good example of the city's earliest, vernacular rowhouse architecture that was loosely based on the designed of early 18th century rowhouses built in older, eastern cities. The Newhall Row is a more ambitious, three-story building designed in the chaste, late Federal style of architecture that was popular for better quality construction in Milwaukee during the 1840s and early 1850s. Only two of the Newhall Row's four original units survive today, but it is the sole surviving example of the heyday of rowhouse construction in Milwaukee before the Civil War.

A fine example of later rowhouse architecture in the city is Abbott/Ogden Row at 1019-1043 E. Ogden Avenue (1889), which is an HPC-designed Milwaukee landmark. Compared with the Peck Rowhouse built about 6 years earlier, the cream brick Abbot/Ogden Row is a more restrained interpretation of the Queen Anne style of architecture. Perhaps one of the last surviving rowhouses built in the city is the fine Colonial Revival structure at 918-24 E. Knapp Street (1897) that was built according to the designed of architect Wm. D. Kimball.

Architectural and Social History of Peck's Row

Peck's Row is the city's most outstanding extant rowhouse of its kind. The exterior of the building is particularly remarkable because it has been spared many of the insensitive alterations that have robbed many of the city's other few, surviving rowhouses of their original character. Built to resemble a large, rambling, free standing, Queen Anne style house of the era, Peck's Row is bedecked with the fine detailing, richly textured wall surfaces and asymmetrical massing that characterized the best Queen Anne style residential structures. This architectural style was a popular one in Milwaukee since it coincided with a major boom period in the city's history.

Constructed towards the end of the rowhouse building era in Milwaukee, work probably began on Peck Row in the summer of 1883 shortly after Peck purchased the lot it stand on. The rowhouse was finished by October of 1883 and several Milwaukee professionals, including a grain broker and a dentist, had moved in by 1884.

The building was originally constructed as 6 contiguous, 2-1/2 story town houses style apartments. Each unit was reportedly built with a sliding partition wall between the front and back parlors so that the two rooms could be combined into a single ballroom to accommodate social events and large parties that were an important part of late nineteenth century social life in Milwaukee.

The Peck Rowhouse remained a fashionable address for upper middle class tenants at least until the time of World War I, but then declined in prestige during the 1920s and 1930s as the real estate market began to change in the surrounding, lower east side neighborhood. Peck's Row has passed through a series of owners since the Peck family sold the structure about 75 years ago, but the original exterior character of the building has remained substantially intact. The most drastic change to the structure occurred in 1936 when interior remodeling transformed the building into a 67-unit rooming house.

George W. Peck

The building is historically significant to Milwaukee because of its original owner and long-time occupant, George W. Peck (1840-1916) who was a nationally-known author, entrepreneur and politician. He was born in Jefferson County, New York and moved to Whitewater, Wisconsin with his parents when he was a boy. Peck quit his formal education at the age of 15 to pursue his interest in writing and, prior to 1868, started at least two newspapers in Wisconsin, but both of these ventures failed.

Determined to succeed as a writer, however, Peck left the state in 1868 to take a job in New York City on Brick Pomeroy's newspaper the *Democrat*. In the early 1870's Peck returned to Wisconsin to manage an established, Pomeroy-owned newspaper in LaCrosse, but that paper, too, subsequently failed. Peck quickly brushed aside this failure and went on to start his own successful newspaper in LaCrosse, WI called the *Sun*, which he moved to Milwaukee in 1878. The *Sun* had a national circulation of over 100,000 and even achieved international readership with a branch office opened in London, England. A very popular regular feature of his paper was a series of short fiction he wrote called the *Bad Boy Stories*. Based on the mischievous antics of a young boy, Peck's column was the basis for his nationally acclaimed book, *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa*, (1883). By 1900 over 1 million copies of the book were in print and stage productions were rivaling *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in popularity across the country. Shortly after the book was published, Peck built the fine, 6-unit rowhouse at 1620-28 North Farwell Avenue in 1883 as an income property, although one of the units would later be his home for nearly two decades.

The lingering popularity of the series and the book is reflected in the fact that at least three Hollywood films were based on it. The first film, *Peck's Bad Boy* (1921) was a silent feature starring Jackie Coogan who was one of the most popular child actors of the day. A sequel, also titled *Peck's Bad Boy* (1934) featured another childhood star, Jackie Cooper. The third and final film, *Peck's Bad Boy with the Circus* (1938) starred Spanky MacFarland.

After Peck firmly established himself as a writer and publisher, he vaulted into a full-time political career by winning the race for Milwaukee Mayor in 1889. He had barely settled into his first elected office when he staged a political upset by winning the race for Wisconsin Governor in 1890. Peck then resigned his mayoral post, moved to Madison and served two terms as Governor from 1890 to 1894.

After losing the Governor's race in 1894, Peck returned to Milwaukee and lived in a fine mansion at 1629 North Prospect Avenue (razed) until 1897 when he moved into the southernmost unit of the rowhouse he built in 1883 at 1620-28 North Farwell Avenue. He lived there longer than any other place during his 40 years in Milwaukee and apparently died there on April 16, 1916. The rowhouse subsequently passed to his children who, in turn, sold the

structure in June of 1920 for \$45,000 to investor Charles J. Cumming of Milwaukee. Since then ownership of the building has changed several times.

VIII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the George W. Peck Rowhouse, 1620-28 North Farwell Avenue be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-3 and e-5 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81 (2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

e-3. Is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Milwaukee.

e-5. Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

IX. 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, which would alter the building's height, roofline or pitch.

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 original color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting limestone, terra cotta or brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

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

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of window panes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing that have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design 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 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. Porches, 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. Retain porches and steps visible from the public right of way that are historically and architecturally appropriate to the building. Avoid altering porches and steps by enclosing open porches or replacing wooden steps with cast concrete steps or by removing original architectural features, such as handrails, balusters, columns or brackets.

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the front elevation facing North Farwell Avenue. 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 principle elevations or is visible from the public right-of-way.

F. Sign/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 shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building if visible from the public right-of-way.