

# HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

## SECOND WARD SAVINGS BANK (Milwaukee County Historical Center) (Written Summer 1982)

### I. NAME

Historic: Second Ward Savings Bank

Common: Milwaukee County Historical Center

### II. LOCATION

910 North Third Street

Legal Property Description: Original plat of the town of Milwaukee west of the river in Secs (20 & 29)-7-22 vip 3

### III. CLASSIFICATION

Building

### IV. OWNER OF PROPERTY

Milwaukee County  
c/o Milwaukee County Courthouse, Ed Kornblum  
901 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 102  
Milwaukee, WI 53233

### V. DESCRIPTION

The Milwaukee County Historical Center building is a two-story, wedge-shaped structure. Its shape is the result of site constraints since it originally stood on a triangular lot bounded by streets on three sides. Plankinton Avenue, which bounded the site on the east, was abandoned in 1975 to permit the expansion of Pere Marquette Park up to the east elevation of the building.

The flat-roofed building is constructed of gray Bedford limestone laid in coursed ashlar. Stylistically, it is an example of Beaux-Arts Classicism with its richly articulated wall surfaces and elaborate fenestration. The major decorative features of the exterior are engaged Ionic columns that define the bays, the continuous unornamented frieze, modillion cornice and parapet balustrade with encompass the structure. Virtually the entire non-structural wall surface of the building is devoted to the large windows, which extend from foundation to frieze between the columns. The first level windows are tri partite units with fixed plate glass glazing and side opening casement windows, which are topped by richly molded, segmental caps. The taller second floor fenestration reflects the three-part division of the lower floor windows, but is more Baroque in character with curving and elliptical glazing bars and arched tops accented with console keystones. Pedimented entries are located in the central bays of the east and west elevations.

With the review of historic photographs and building permits, the exterior of the Milwaukee County Historical Center has remained in essentially original form and condition. The only noticeable changes were the removal of the original revolving doors at the main entrances and the filling-in of the sliding exterior doors.

## **VI. SIGNIFICANCE**

Date Built or Altered: 1913

Builder/Architect: Charles Kirchhoff and Thomas L. Rose, architects

The Milwaukee County Historical Center was cited as significant for its role in Milwaukee's banking community, as a major work of architects Charles Kirchhoff and Thomas L. Rose, and for its present use as a major depository of Milwaukee County historical records and artifacts. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, recorded for the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1969, and named a Milwaukee Landmark in 1969.

## **VII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends to the Historic Preservation Commission the designation of the Milwaukee County Historical Center building as an historic structure as defined in Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

Our recommendation is based on the previous recognition received by this building and in the areas of significance as enumerated above.

## **VIII. HISTORY**

The structure presently used as the headquarters of the Milwaukee County Historical Society was originally constructed as the Second Ward Savings Bank. Founded in 1856, the bank was one of Milwaukee's first banking institutions. Following its reorganization in 1866, it became known as the "Brewers Bank" because it was owned and patronized by the city's leading brewery owners including Valentine Blatz, Joseph Schlitz, Philip Best, Emil Schandein and August Uihlein. August Uihlein eventually became the largest stockholder and was president of the bank until his death in 1911 when he was succeeded by his son, Joseph.

The bank was well known for its sound investment practices and attracted many depositors from the German-American community. The Second Ward Savings Bank was one of the few major Milwaukee financial institutions to survive the Panic of 1893. Although a run on the bank appeared imminent, August Uihlein appeared at the bank and told the assembled depositors that he would personally guarantee all deposits, which at that time totaled about \$9,000,000. The crowd was satisfied and dispersed, thus saving the bank.

It was August's son, Joseph, who had the present structure erected in 1913 to replace an earlier bank on the site. The bank prospered and by 1928, when it merged with the First Wisconsin National Bank, it was one of the largest savings institutions in Milwaukee. The building remained in the possession of First Wisconsin until 1965 when it donated the structure to Milwaukee County for use by the Historical Society. It serves as the society's headquarters and houses a museum, extensive artifact collections, and an invaluable archive and research library containing countless materials on local history. The society has proven a major asset in educating the public on Milwaukee's past.

This structure is probably the finest extant commercial design of the architectural firm of Kirchhoff and Rose. This firm was heavily patronized by Joseph Uihlein, and designed many of his Schlitz Brewery Saloons, The Trivoli Palm Garden, residences for his family, and Uihlein's own residence on Lake Drive. Influenced by the Beaux-Arts Classicism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the firm chose a well-proportioned plan based on French prototypes. Built to conform to the irregular site, it was a dignified, visual symbol of Milwaukee's conservative banking community.

## **IX. 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 the Milwaukee County Historical Society building. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

### **A. Roofs**

The existing building height, rooflines and pitch, shall not be changed or modified. Subject to approval of the Commission, dormers, skylights, or solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they do not visually rise above the existing parapet.

### **B. Openings**

The location and style of window and door openings and the number and configuration of panes shall be retained on all street elevations, except that restoration to the documented original condition shall be permitted.

Replacement and repair materials shall resemble the original in color, texture, and composition so the appearance of the building is not altered. Additional openings or changes in the size or configuration of existing openings shall not be permitted, unless approved by the Historic Preservation Commission, except that restoration to the documented original condition shall be permitted. Approval for changes shall be based on the compatibility of the proposed changes with the style and period of the building.

### **C. Additions**

Because of the unique design and siting of the building, all elevations are of equal significance to the structure's architectural integrity. Additions are not recommended. However, any approved additions must be designed in such a way so as not to destroy original architectural fabric and to be constructed in such a way that by the removal of the addition, the building would be restored to the appearance it had before the addition was made. The design of additions should be compatible with the original structure in massing, scale, proportions, materials, color, composition, and texture.

### **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 member in scale, design, color and materials.

E. Materials

Unpainted masonry shall not be painted or covered. Any repairs, including reporting of defective mortar, shall match the original in color, style, texture and strength characteristics. Masonry shall be cleaned only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible approved by the Commission.

F. Signs

The installation of any additional permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building based upon the Commission's review of scale drawings of the proposed design and samples of the proposed materials and colors.