



**NICHOLAS SENN, M.D.**  
(1844-1908)

In a laboratory under the sidewalk of his office at this site, in the 1870's, Dr. Senn conducted far-reaching experiments which led to international renown as the "great master of abdominal surgery."

He was one of Wisconsin's greatest surgeons, physicians and medical pioneers, and the 49th president of The American Medical Association. Dr. Senn was a founder of the Association of Military Surgeons of the U. S. A.

*Wisconsin Historical Society*



# Nicholas Senn Building

"Sydney Hih"

300-318 W. Juneau Ave.

Historic Designation Study Report

February 2009

**HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT**

**I. NAME**

Historic: Nicholas Senn Building/Senn Block

Common Name: Sydney Hih

**II. LOCATION**

300-318 W. Juneau Avenue

**Legal Description -** Tax Key No.: 361-040-9100

Original Plat of the Town of Milwaukee, west of the river in SECS (20 & 29)-7-22

Block 39 Lot 16 & Part Lot 13 Com SW Cor Lot 13-th N 10'-th-E 60.2'-th S 7.2'-th E15.43'-th S 1.74—th W 74.96' to Beg

Subj to X-WayEasm't

Bids #15, #21, TID #48

**NOTE: THIS NOMINATION INCLUDES ONLY THE BUILDING THAT WAS CONSTRUCTED BY NICHOLAS SENN AND NOT THE OTHER ADJACENT BUILDINGS TO THE WEST. THE BOUNDARY LINES REFLECT THE BUILDING'S HISTORIC LOT LINES AND RUN CONCURRENT WITH ALL FOUR SIDES OF THE BUILDING.**

**III. CLASSIFICATION**

Building

**IV. OWNERS**

Sydney Hih Development LLC  
270 E. Highland Avenue  
Robert Ruvn, Registered Agent  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Robert Ruvn  
Registered Agent  
Sydney Hih Development LLC  
1317 Towne Square Road  
Mequon, WI 53092

**ALDERMAN**

Ald. Milele Coggs, 6th Aldermanic District

**NOMINATOR**

Gail Fitch

**V. YEAR BUILT**

1876 (Milwaukee Sentinel March 13, 1876, April 5 1876, May 1, 1876, July 27, 1876)

**ARCHITECT:**

Unknown

NOTE PORTIONS OF THIS REPORT HAVE BEEN TAKEN FROM THE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM PREPARED IN 2000 AS PART OF THE UNDERTAKING THAT RESULTED IN THE REMOVAL OF THE PARK EAST FREEWAY. THE REPORT WAS PREPARED BY TRACI SCHNELL OF HERITAGE RESEARCH LTD. AS A SUBCONTRACTOR TO HNTB CORP.

**VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

The Nicholas Senn Building is a four story, flat roofed, solid masonry cream brick building located at the northwest corner of W. Juneau Ave. and King Dr. The building is approximately forty-five feet wide (Juneau Ave.) by fifty feet deep (King Dr.) and today is joined under one tax key parcel in a complex formerly known as Sydney Hih. The Senn Building and the adjacent three buildings to the west were all built independently of one another. They are the sole survivors of this block following the construction of the Park East Freeway in the late 1960s. The freeway isolated this portion of the city from adjacent commercial areas to the south (Old World Third Street) and the warehouse/industrial/brewery district to the north. The immediate neighborhood is characterized by surface lots at the northeast, southeast, and southwest corners of the intersection and vacant land in the corridor of the old freeway, which was demolished in the early twenty-first century. Most of Juneau Avenue was razed, even the south side of the street, before the freeway was constructed. Spared were the Sydney Hih complex, the Gipfel Brewery, and a few businesses around Fifth Street. With the removal of the Park East Freeway, there are approximately sixteen acres of open land awaiting development.

The Senn Building was designed in the Italianate Style, popular at the time for commercial as well as residential buildings. It has two principal elevations, one fronting on Juneau Ave. (formerly Chestnut) and one on King Dr. (formerly Third). The north and west walls abutted adjacent buildings and are mostly blank. Ornamental features included corbelled brickwork and sheet metal cornices. The first story consists of a storefront while the upper stories feature arched windows, which are a character-defining feature of the Italianate style.

The upper stories are arranged into three bays on each elevation by vertical pilasters at the corners and between groupings of windows. Windows are grouped into pairs except for the center bay on the King Dr. elevation, which features three windows, attributable to the longer length of that façade. Typical of the 1860s and 1870s, windows are enframed with corbelled brick rather than sheet metal. Stone keystones and impost blocks add decorative touches. The windows themselves vary from two-over-sash to two-over-one, one-over-two and one-over-one. The windows of the third story are noticeably taller than on the other floors and indicate a hall was located at this portion of the building. A brick, paneled cornice separates the second from the third story and is topped with a stone stringcourse that forms the sills of the third story windows. The fourth story windows features stone sills supported by small corbels. Above the fourth story windows survives a corbelled band that once supported a sheet metal cornice. A historic image produced in 1877 shows that the broad cornice had a pediment positioned in the center bay of each elevation. The name "Senn's Block" and "1876" appeared directly below the pediment on the King Dr. elevation in the illustration. It is not known if this was artistic license or factual. In place of this original cornice is located block letters spelling out Sydney Hih on both primary elevations. A metal fire escape is located at the north end of the east elevation.

The storefront on the first floor represents a remodeling undertaken by West Side Bank in 1910 and it was designed by the firm of Leenhouts and Guthrie. City directories, Milwaukee Sentinel articles, fire insurance maps and the 1877 illustration show that the first floor had been divided

into two retail spaces each having a center door on Juneau Ave. flanked by large plate glass windows. There appear to be window wells illuminating the basement area. A smaller entrance into the first floor area was located right around the corner from the east most storefront on today's King Dr. Another entrance, accessing the upper floors, was located at the north end of the King Dr. elevation. We do know from permit records that changes were made to the storefront in 1893 and that an entrance was put at the corner right about the time that West Side Bank was organized. More significant changes were made in 1910 when the stone piers were installed, the bulkhead raised and smaller plate glass windows installed. The entire first floor now read as one unified storefront, important since it was occupied by one entity, West Side Bank. It is likely that the copper cornice above the storefront was installed at this time since the more Classical Revival details, modillions, corbels with swags, are not characteristic of the Italianate Style. Such alterations would have been in keeping with the trend toward classicism that banks nationwide were beginning to follow at the time. The raising of the bulkhead also gave a more substantial, secure appearance to the financial institution. The bank's entry was at the corner and called out by two stone arches supported by scrolled corbels. A similar arch called out the entrance to the upper floors at the north end of the King Dr. elevation. The remaining storefront consists of a series of stone piers with decorative tops in between which are located panes of glass (now boarded up). The westernmost storefront bay on Juneau Ave. was cut down to provide an at-grade entrance to the building. After West Side Bank acquired the building next door, once addressed at 306-308 W. Juneau Ave., it extended a matching storefront treatment to that building as well. There were once four or more basement windows, visible in pre-1950s photos, but they have now been blocked up or removed.

The north elevation, as indicated above features a blank wall and once abutted the east wing of the William Frankfurth Hardware Company Building.

The west elevation is mostly blank. It abuts a smaller three-story building to the west. A metal enclosed catwalk on the roof of this latter building extends from the Senn Building to the four-story south facing portion of the Frankfurth Hardware Company Building. Since the building to the west is not as deep as the Senn Building, a portion of the Senn Building extends beyond the rear wall. Here are located two unembellished arched windows, one at the second and one at the third floor. The second story window has a two-paned upper sash while the lower sash has been broken out. It retains its original brick mould. The upper opening has been fitted with a flat-headed window and the brick mould removed. The upper sash is single-paned and the lower sash has been broken out.

Changes to the building have been chronicled above. Virtually all the alterations were made by West Side Bank. The storefront was changed in 1893 and again in 1910. The sheet metal cornice survived into the 1950s and was removed and replaced with bank signage as shown in a 1955 photo in the collection of Milwaukee Central Library. Window sash were replaced as needed although the window openings were retained. Original windows were most likely two-over-two. The windows shown in the 1877 illustration are one-over-one sash while the extant windows show some two-over-two sash. These latter would have been more typical of the time period with later replacements featuring larger panes of glass.

The Senn Building, although undergoing some modifications over its 132-year existence, still exhibits the character defining features of the Italianate Style and is restorable. It can still be identified with the work of the internationally renowned Dr. Senn.

## **VII. SIGNIFICANCE**

The Senn Building is significant as the only remaining building in Milwaukee associated with the life and work of Dr. Nicholas Senn. Dr. Senn attained worldwide recognition while working in Milwaukee due to his pioneering efforts in abdominal surgery, research on asepsis and antiseptic

procedures, and his teaching and wide range of medical publications. He brought recognition to Milwaukee and Milwaukee Hospital as a result of his efforts and influenced an entire generation of surgeons who went on to further enhance the reputation of the city. Dr. Senn had this building constructed to accommodate his broad private medical practice and to serve as a place where students and medical professionals would gather to learn from one another. In the basement of the building he experimented with medical procedures that he would later carry out on patients. We have no other tangible place to associate with him. The building in which he performed surgery at Milwaukee Hospital (later Sinai Samaritan, no longer a medical campus) is long gone. Dr. Senn's residences have also been demolished. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Senn Building has been recognized for its associations with Dr. Senn. On May 4, 1960, a Wisconsin Historical Society marker was installed on the building, the result of efforts by the State Medical Society of Wisconsin. Likewise, while virtually all other buildings were removed along Juneau Ave. for freeway construction, the Senn Building and three adjacent neighbors, along with the Gipfel Brewery were spared. In February 2000, when the building was vacant and for sale, the Sydney Hih complex, as it became known, was named among the "10 Most Endangered Buildings 2000" by the Historic Preservation Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

The Senn Building is also a valuable survivor from the period when Juneau Avenue was once a vibrant commercial thoroughfare, crowned by the view of the giant Pabst Brewery to the west. With the exception of a couple of blocks along Old World Third Street and the Senn Building grouping, little remains of the nineteenth century character of Kilbourn town. Twentieth century buildings and large-scale redevelopment projects like the Bradley Center and vacant renewal sites now dominate the area.

The Senn Building likewise represents the kind of nineteenth century building, which has mostly disappeared from Milwaukee's landscape. Large masonry buildings with multiple tenants were fairly common but there was a new type that came into prominence in the 1870s, the commercial block with upper story hall. This building type reflects the explosion in the number of social and fraternal groups that occurred after the Civil War, groups that needed spacious accommodations for their meetings, social events, educational programs and the like. A few examples survive like Stamm's Hall at 221-227 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street (c.1865), J.L. Burnham Building Hall at 907-911 W. National Avenue (1875), Lipps Hall in the Lipps' Building at 1103 N. Old World Third Street (1878) and the Schlitz Building and Hall at 2249 N. Humboldt Avenue at North Avenue (1890). City directory research indicates that there were numerous halls of this type located in the downtown and in every major commercial district. With the decline in the numbers of such groups, disinvestment in the city and urban renewal and freeway projects, most such buildings have been demolished. At Senn's Hall, veterans of the famous Civil War Wisconsin Iron Brigade voted to create a permanent veterans' organization in 1880.

In addition to the above factors, the Senn Building acquired social significance in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as one of the centers of Milwaukee's counter culture. The unique signage on the building and the host of unusual merchants, musicians, and restaurateurs brought a rebirth of activity to the northwest corner of Juneau and Old World third Street. Virtually every baby boomer that lived in the city has some fond memory of Sydney Hih.

## **VIII. HISTORY**

Of the grouping of four 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings that stand at the northwest corner of Juneau Avenue and King Drive known as Sydney Hih, the easternmost building, the Nicholas Senn Block, stands out for the importance of its association with Dr. Nicholas Senn. Senn was one of those rare, larger than life individuals who through genius and determination, made an enormous impact on the international medical field through his research, teaching and publications. An indefatigable person, he experimented, performed surgery, and taught students by day and wrote prolifically through the

night. He is credited with at least twenty-five textbooks and over three hundred articles on medical topics. He was much in demand for consultation, lectures and his administrative abilities and served on the teaching, surgical and consultation staff of a number of hospitals as well the military.

Nicholas Senn was born on October 31, 1844 (some sources cite October 24, 1844) at Buchs, in the Canton of St. Gall, Switzerland and came to the United States with his parents John and Magdalena Senn in 1851 at the age of eight. The family settled in Fond du Lac County/Washington County (sources differ), Wisconsin in the community of Ashford. Senn attended Fond du Lac High School and then taught school before beginning study in 1864 with Dr. Emanuel Munk who was residing in Fond du Lac at the time. Dr. Munk mostly lived in the city of Milwaukee. Senn went on to the Chicago Medical College in 1865, studied medicine and surgery, and graduated in 1868. He served an eighteen-month internship at the Cook County Hospital and in 1869 married Aurelia S. Muehlhaeuser (also spelled Millhauser), who had been born in Blairsville, Indiana County, Pennsylvania but was living in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Shortly after their marriage, the couple returned to Fond du Lac County and located in the community of Ashford. A son, Emanuel J., was born in Elmore, Wisconsin on November 18, 1869. The two communities of Ashford and Elmore are in close proximity to one another. Senn relocated to Milwaukee in 1874 and was appointed chief medical director of Milwaukee Hospital (later known as Sinai Samaritan, the campus is no longer a medical complex), a position he held through 1891. He is said to have built up "in a short time the largest private practice in the city." It was during his tenure in Milwaukee that Senn pioneered many of the surgical breakthroughs for which he became famous. (Gregory Vol II 1931 p. 973; Flower p. 1020, Usher p. 2022 and 2023)

Shortly after moving to Milwaukee, Senn's boundless energy led him to purchase the Hustis Block, located at the northwest corner of N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (King Dr. today) and Chestnut Street (W. Juneau Avenue today). The Hustis Block had been the first brick block constructed in Milwaukee, built by John Hustis in 1840 and known for its substantial three-story construction, the location of the printing of the first German newspaper and for its hall in which the first theatrical entertainments were given in the fledgling community. (Buck, Pioneer History, p. 245) A Milwaukee Sentinel report had previously indicated that the building appeared to be ready for a refurbishment in 1874 and maybe there were some repairs done to the building. (MS 1874 April 8/4) By this era, the Hustis Building, while venerated, was considered out of date. Dr. Senn purchased the building on March 8, 1876 for \$11,000 from Joseph and Margareth Phillips and Mary S. Goodrich (the only child and heir of Susan Robinson, deceased). (Deeds 155:446) On March 13<sup>th</sup> the Sentinel reported that Dr. Senn was about to build a block of stores, 45 feet wide and 50 feet long, at the site of the Hustis Block. (MS 1876 March 13 8/2) By May 1<sup>st</sup> the Hustis Block was being demolished and by July 27<sup>th</sup> the new building was nearly completed. It was considered to be an improvement over the old Hustis Block and an asset for Chestnut Street (today's Juneau Avenue). (MS May 1 8/4, July 27 8/3 and November 27 8/3) It was during the construction of the building that Senn's second son, William N. was born on June 1, 1876 and that Senn served as a delegate to the Medical Congress of the United States. (Usher p. 2026; Flower p. 1020)

There were probably several reasons why Senn decided to construct a four-story structure. In the days before the extensive medical complexes we are familiar with today, a physician like Senn would have needed office space for his extensive private practice, for experimentation, and to serve as a gathering place for students and professionals to exchange and gather information. One such meeting was chronicled by the Milwaukee Sentinel when the Milwaukee Medical Society met on March 7, 1878 to hear a paper on and discuss astigmatism of the eye. (MS 1878 Mar 8 2/4) Such a space was not available on the grounds of Milwaukee Hospital or on the premises of the other major medical institution of the time, St. Mary's Hospital. The new building would also generate income through leases to other tenants. Senn's building would have been the in the height of fashion at the time. There were two primary elevations, one facing east onto 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (King Drive) and one facing south on Chestnut Street (Juneau Avenue). The building occupied the east portion of Lot 16 and abutted adjacent buildings to the west and north. The Italianate style building was of solid masonry construction and featured a prominent sheet metal cornice with pediments centered on each elevation. The words "Senn's Block" and the date, "1876", appeared below the east

pediment in an illustration from 1877 and may have actually been on the building and not just part of the rendering. (Milwaukee Illustrated p. 85) A prominent cornice also wrapped around the two principal elevations between the first and second stories. The slightly taller windows of the fourth floor indicate that there was a hall on this topmost floor and this is corroborated with information from news accounts and the city directories.

Early occupants of the building, besides Dr. Senn, included physicians like Dr. John P. Bading, dentists like William A. Fricke and Edward H. Wanko, lawyers as Stephen W. Granger and Scharffenberg Bolle, and photographers Adam Heeb, Jr. and Henry Hercher. There was said to be a barbershop in the basement as well as Dr. Senn's laboratory. It was here that he conducted experiments to perfect his techniques before operating on his patients. There were two ground floor retail storefronts. The west storefront, originally addressed at 304 Chestnut, was occupied Frank Ostermann's dry goods shop. When he died in 1886, his widow took over the business briefly and then turned it over to John W. Dunlap in 1887. The east storefront, addressed at 302 Chestnut, was occupied by Otto Schorse's Union Drug Store. On June 27, 1879, an explosion rocked Schorse's pharmacy, causing damage to the building. Schorse had "prepared quantities of composition for red, blue and yellow lights to be used during evening celebrations of the Saengerfest" and there was spontaneous combustion of the compounds. The large French plate glass storefront windows, four feet wide and six feet high and three-eighths thick, were shattered. Flames and smoke spread to Ostermann's dry goods shop and combustibles were burned in the basement. The fire department quickly put out the fire before any damage extended beyond the first floor. Schorse's stock of chemicals, medicines and drugs, valued at \$8,000, was destroyed but Schorse escaped unharmed. Dr. Senn was in his office immediately above the pharmacy and felt the concussion but likewise was unharmed. Schorse resumed his occupancy of the storefront once the building was repaired.

Not a lot of detail is known about the rental hall operations but it would have been typical for different fraternal and social organizations to use such halls for meetings, social events, educational programs and the like. We do know that singing societies were meeting in Senn's Hall. Among them were the Gesang Verein Milwaukee and the Schweitzer Maennerchor. An historic event took place here as well in 1880, related to the forming of a Civil War veterans' organization. In a meeting held on June 10, 1880, during a reunion of members of Wisconsin's famous Iron Brigade, it was decided to form a permanent organization of the Iron Brigade veterans. A dues structure was discussed and members pledged to take "measures which will perpetuate the social and fraternal feelings arising from service together through many campaigns." (Milwaukee City Directory; Dix p. 4; MS 1897 June 28 3/1; MS 1880 June 11 7/4)

Dr. Senn was not only a talented surgeon but also an inspiring and brilliant teacher and "[s]tudents flocked to him." Historian Gregory subsequently lists a number of physicians who were taught and inspired by Senn including John Bading, Blanchard A. Lynde, Anna M. Connell, and Dr. Harriet Francis Sercombe among a host of others. Senn was known for extensive experimental work. Among the physicians associated with him in breaking new medical ground were Dr. Horace Manchester Brown, Dr. Gilbert E. Seaman and Dr. William Mackie. His office on today's Juneau Avenue was used as an informal classroom where all who were interested in medicine attended quizzes. (Gregory, Vol II 1931 p. 974)

During Senn's career in Milwaukee and afterwards, he was considered one of the most distinguished surgeons of the world. He continued his own education at the University of Munich, Germany, in 1878 and graduated in 1879. In 1887, his work on the repair of intestinal perforation, begun as an attempt to heal a gunshot wound, became known worldwide. An indefatigable worker, Senn wrote at least twenty-five medical textbooks and contributed to hundreds of papers. Among his writings are:

- Experimental surgery
- Intestinal Surgery
- Surgical Bacteriology
- Principles of Surgery

Pathology and Surgical treatment of Tumors  
Abdominal Surgery on the Battlefield  
The Surgery of the Pancreas  
The Surgical Treatment of Intestinal Obstruction  
(Usher p. 2025, Sinai Samaritan Medical Center Manuscript Collection index)

In addition, after investigating the failure of carbolic spray to prevent sepsis, Dr. Senn determined that bacteria was coming from the hands of the surgeons and infecting the patients. "Dr. Senn probably was one of the first surgeons to use gloves (cotton gloves, boiled) in operating." (Dix p. 5)

Senn's services were in demand outside of Wisconsin while he maintained his Chief of Staff position at Milwaukee Hospital. From 1884 through 1887 he served as professor of surgery at Chicago's College of Physicians and Surgeons, now the medical school of the University of Illinois. He was elected professor of practical and clinical surgery of Rush Medical College in 1890, a post he held until his death. He also served as the professor of surgery at the University of Chicago, was the attending physician at the Presbyterian Hospital and worked as surgeon in chief at St. Joseph's Hospital. (Usher p. 2023)

Senn's contribution to military surgery was also legendary throughout the world and he sought to make antiseptic and aseptic surgery simpler on the battlefield than they were in civil practice. He was appointed surgeon General of Wisconsin in 1888, and Surgeon General of the Illinois National Guard in 1892. In 1891 he established the Association of Military Surgeons of the National Guard of the United States. In 1898 he was appointed chief surgeon of the Sixth Army Corps and became chief of operating staff surgeons with the American army during the Spanish American War. He actually served in Santiago, Cuba. (Usher p. 2024-2025)

Among his other affiliations were the American Surgical Association (president), the German Congress of Surgeons, corresponding member of the Harveian Society of London, and honorary member of the Edinburgh Medical Society. He was president of the Rock River Medical Society and vice-president of the State Medical Society. In 1890 he was chosen an American delegate to the International Medical Congress and in 1901 went abroad as delegate to the international Red Cross conference. In 1897 he served as the 49<sup>th</sup> President of the American Medical Association. Senn was also responsible for donating over seven thousand volumes of medical texts, collected by noted physicians Dr. William Baum and Dr. DuBois Raymond, to the Newberry Library of Chicago in 1894. (Usher p. 2024; Flower p.1020)

For a number of years, Senn commuted between his practices in Milwaukee and Chicago. He permanently relocated to Chicago in 1891 following his appointment at Rush Medical College and sold the Senn Building to George Koch on June 29, 1891 for \$40,000. (Deeds 279:612) Senn died in Chicago on January 2, 1908 of heart disease following a condition contracted from mountain climbing in South America. (He also wrote a number of travel texts) The head of Marquette University's medical department, Dr. W. H. Earles, stated upon Senn's death "Dr. Senn was to my mind, one of the ablest surgeons in the United States, if not in the world...He was an able surgeon, an able teacher, and an able writer. Many medical men are one of these three, but it is seldom indeed that one finds a man who is an [sic] adept in each of the three lines." Dr. A. H. Levings, president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, stated, "Dr. Senn was the greatest surgeon in the country...He seemed to be possessed of unlimited endurance and his capacity for work was wonderful." ("Dr. Nicholas Senn Dies in Chicago" Milwaukee Sentinel January 3, 1908)

"A variety of books addressing the history of medicine note Dr. Senn's contribution to surgery. A *Cyclopedia of American Medical Biography* (1912), states that Senn is considered "the greatest surgeon, medical authority and writer the West had ever produced and his innovative work in abdominal surgery won him international acclaim." Sixty-five years after his death Senn's work remained in the history books as

*The Story of Medicine in America* (1973) reads, "N. Senn laid the groundwork, in a way, for a sub-specialty by his work in intestinal surgery." Posthumous tributes to the doctor include the Chicago-based, Nicholas Senn Club (organized in 1908), the 1952 Senn Wing at the Milwaukee Hospital (now Sinai Samaritan Health Care Center: wing dedicated in 1952) [note: this campus was sold off to developers and no longer serves as a health care facility] and the Senn Journal (a publication of the Milwaukee Hospital from 1960-1976)." (Traci Schnell, Heritage Research Determination of Eligibility, pp. 7-8)

Senn's legacy was still being honored well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1958 efforts began in the State Medical Society of Wisconsin to erect a historic marker memorializing the great doctor. The site chosen was the Senn Building at the northwest corner of Juneau Avenue and King Drive, a place most fitting. The building in which Dr. Senn worked at Milwaukee Hospital was no longer extant. His residences were gone. A Wisconsin state historic plaque was installed on the building on May 4, 1960. It was stolen in 1968 and never recovered. (Dix p. 6)

George Koch (1863-March 7, 1922), who purchased the Senn Building in 1891, was a Milwaukee native who was employed in a variety of occupations before entering banking. He worked for Frankfurth Hardware, for Manufacturers Bank, and as a grain, feed and commission merchant. Koch returned to banking when a branch of the Merchants & Exchange Bank was established in the Senn Block. It was formally reorganized as a state bank under the name West Side Bank in July 1894 when its parent institution merged with the First National Bank. Koch held the most stock in the bank and served as the institution's cashier through the remainder of his career. It was considered one of the strongest and soundest financial institutions in the city by 1920. The title to the Senn Building apparently remained in Koch's name and then his estate after his death. West Side Bank acquired the property from Koch's estate on February 23, 1937. (Bruce, p. 360; 707; Fifth Semi-Annual Report of the Bank Examiner p.76; Deeds 279:612; 1462:490)

There were a number of alterations to building following its occupancy by the bank. On March 23, 1893, the storefront was changed and the entrance was moved to the corner. It is likely the dual storefronts from Senn's day were consolidated into one unified front at this time. West Side Bank made the most significant change to the building's exterior in 1910. They contracted with the firm of Leenhouts and Guthrie who added a large copper cornice that wrapped the building above the first story. The bulkhead was raised and clad in stone and stone piers were installed with large plate glass windows inserted between the piers. It is likely the corner entrance was embellished with arches at this time as well. Sign bands reading "West Side Bank" were installed beneath the modillions of the new copper cornice on both the Juneau Avenue and King Drive elevations. Two smaller signs reading "Established 1893" were positioned over the double-arched corner entrance. Permit records do not indicate when the sheet metal cornice was removed, but historic photos in the collection of the Milwaukee Central library show that it had been removed by the 1955 and replaced with large flat signboards that read "West Side Bank". The building was not painted at this time.

The bank began to acquire property to the west during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its immediate neighbor to the west, once addressed as 306-308 W. Juneau Avenue, underwent remodeling by the bank in 1956 that removed its attractive two-story sheet metal bays and reduced the façade to the bland appearance it has today. City directories began to list number 308 as the rear entrance to the bank around 1955. (Milwaukee Central Library photo collection Juneau Avenue; permit records January 4, 1956) It is not clear how much of the upper floors were utilized by West Side Bank. The second floor was remodeled in 1918, partitions were changed on the first and second floor in 1953, and other permits refer to cutting in openings in masonry walls for access to adjacent buildings. When the bank first occupied the building, there were still some professional tenants on the upper floors such as Dr. Louis G. Nolte who was in the building from at least 1900 to the early 1940s. Access to the upper floors was through an entrance on King Dr. addressed at Number 365. Beginning in the 1920s, in addition to Dr. Nolte, there was a janitor, then his widow, living on the premises. The Milwaukee County American Legion Drum Corps also occupied one of the upper levels, perhaps the former hall, as shown in the 1940 city directory. After World War II, the upper floors were

consistently shown as vacant in the city directories. West Side Bank changed its name to Continental Bank & Trust on September 7, 1967 and relocated to a new twelve-story structure at 735 W. Wisconsin Avenue in 1968. It is now known as Wells Fargo Bank. This relocation was occurring at the time that most of Juneau Avenue was cleared for the construction of the Park East Freeway.

Permit records show that an application to install a "For Sale" sign on the building was taken out on February 9, 1970. The former Senn Block sat vacant for several years before being sold to the Knapp Street Realty Corp., Sydney Eisenberg, president, on land contract on June 15, 1971 and then through warranty deed July 23, 1971. The property conveyed the Senn Building as well as the adjacent property once addressed at 306-308 W. Juneau Avenue. (Deeds R592: 235, R600: 1451, and R600: 1453) The old Frankfurth Hardware Building, once addressed at 310 W. Juneau Avenue was conveyed by Continental Bank & Trust to Knapp Street Realty Corp. at the same time. (Deeds R592: 235, R600: 1451 and R600: 1453). Knapp Street Realty Corp. also purchased the building once addressed at 312-316 W. Juneau Avenue from the Peckarsky family in 1971. Eisenberg renamed the complex Sydney Hih (Hih is Yiddish for "In Honor Of").

The Senn Building now entered into a period of rebirth, although it was somewhat short lived. Its exterior, as well as the exterior of the other three buildings, was painted into a multi-colored checkerboard palette to highlight the unique mix of tenants that Eisenberg collected into the complex. Many Baby Boomers have recollections of the place, as it became the hub of counter-culture activity along with Brady Street. Here the tenants were concentrated vertically on different floors rather than along a street. This may have been the first time that an attempt was made to collect artists and creative types into one setting for commercial purposes. Tenants in 1973 included The Industrial Arts Co., a group of commercial artists in Number 312. In the Senn Building were the Delhi Emporium Gift Shop, Dreams and Dragons art gallery, Fermentation Plantation (home winemaking consultants), Main Stream Records, The Mouse Trap gift shop, The Playhouse gifts, Puerto Rican Valley, and Western Tradition Leather retail shop. The Mine Shaft, a restaurant and bar, was located in the basement. Merkt's Cheese occupied Number 310, the Shish Kabob Restaurant occupied Number 312, a rooming house was located at Number 314, and the Fertile Dirt Cooperative Health Food restaurant was located in Number 316. Betty's Bead Bank was the longest tenant, occupying a first floor space from 1976 through 1999. Permit records reflect dozens of occupancy permits for the building from 1971 through 2001 and included candle shops, jewelry stores, plant stores, and ice cream vendors, among others.

By 1980 many of the trendy shops had disappeared and permit records refer to fire damage on the property. The tenants included a business that did typesetting and one that provided legal briefs. Many of the upper floors were utilized as art and music studios with band names like Johnny and the Lewers and the Water Buffaloes Band. In the year 2000 the complex was put up for sale and the buildings painted uniform beige. The Park East Freeway was taken down in recent years and the vacant land around Sydney Hih/Senn Building awaits redevelopment. The current owner, Robert Ruvin, Sydney Hih Development LLC, purchased the complex on June 17, 2005. The developer's original proposal called for preserving the Senn Block and most of the rest of the complex, removing the building at 312-316 and sliding the Gipfel Brewery Building onto that slot. The Senn Building would have served as the entrance to a new office/ hotel/condo development designed by the team of Brian Johnsen and Sebastian Schmaling. In April 2008, a new development proposal was announced, with a new architectural team, HKS. This new proposal would remove all remnants of Sydney Hih and utilize some salvaged bricks for a pathway. (Schumacher, "History Lost")

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## **IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The commission could consider three criteria in deciding whether to recommend historic designation for the Dr. Nicholas Senn Building, 300-318 W. Juneau Avenue.

**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.**

RATIONALE: The Senn Building or Sydney Hih was one of the centers of Milwaukee's counter culture during the 1970s. A unique collection of tenants that ranged from artists' studios to leather shops to vegetarian restaurants offered the hip and trendy a place to hang out and purchase unique goods. There was nothing like it in the city. There are currently no landmarks that commemorate Milwaukee's counter culture period.

**e-3 Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Milwaukee**

Without question, Dr. Nicholas Senn holds a prominent place in 19<sup>th</sup> century American medical history. He owned the building and used a portion of it for his office and his laboratory for a period of years before moving to Chicago. We recommend that the Commission discuss the following questions with regard to this criteria:

- 1) Does a man responsible for medical discoveries and the education of local physicians meet the definition of one who "significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Milwaukee"?
- 2) Does the fact that Dr. Senn had the building constructed and used a portion of it for offices before moving to Chicago confer sufficient status on the building to designate it under criteria e-3?

**e-9 Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or of the City of Milwaukee.**

The building is well-known among contemporary Milwaukeeans as the "Sydney Hih" building, and is highly visible amidst the surrounding vacant land of the Park East corridor. We suggest the Commission discuss the following questions with regard to this criteria:

- 1) The building remained standing despite freeway construction in the 1960s and more recent freeway demolition. Is the building an "established and familiar

- 2) The building has been significantly altered many times in its history, beginning about 30 years after it was constructed. Do the alterations adversely affect its significance as a visual landmark? Have the alterations acquired historic significance of their own? The State Historic Preservation Office found the building not eligible for National Register listing for its association with Dr. Senn due to alterations that occurred after Dr. Senn's ownership.

## **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. Building maintenance and restoration must follow accepted preservation practices as outlined below. Review of maintenance projects with historic preservation staff is required. Note: this designation only applies to the Nicholas Senn Building and not to the other three buildings in the Sydney Hih Complex. As in all designations, historic status does not require the removal of alterations made prior to the designation. It is not intended to prevent new construction on the remainder of the property owned by the developer.

### **A. Roofs**

Retain the appearance of the flat roof shape. Fire insurance maps show that skylights were once located at the roof and illuminated various spaces including a photographer's studio. It is not known if any of the skylight structures survive. Skylights may be restored, if existing, or added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street or public right of way. No additional full stories may be added to the roof, as this would alter its nineteenth century appearance. Locate mechanical systems and vents on portions of the roof not visible from the public right of way and paint them out to minimize impact. Satellite dishes are to be located on portions of the roof not visible from the public right of way. There is a rooftop penthouse unit or structure that shelters an access stair to the roof. It can be rebuilt as needed or removed as needed. The addition of any new small penthouse must be set back from the parapet walls to minimize being visible from the public rights-of-way. The addition of skylights, satellite dishes, penthouses, stair enclosures and re-roofing require review by Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

### **B. Materials**

#### **1. Masonry**

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone must not be painted or covered. Painting masonry is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date. Covering masonry with other materials (wood, sheet metal, vinyl siding, etc.) is not allowed. The building appears to have been unpainted through the mid-1950s per historic photographs but may have been cleaned. The polychrome checkerboard paint scheme applied when the building was renamed Sydney Hih was repainted with beige paint when the building went up for sale in 2000. This beige paint can remain. If the owner would want to remove the paint, that would be appropriate. See section c below.

- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, hardness, texture, joint finish and joint width. See the masonry chapters in the books, As Good As New or Good For Business for explanations on why the use of a proper mortar mix is crucial to making lasting repairs that will not contribute to new deterioration of the masonry. Replaced mortar joints should be tooled to match the style of the original. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before starting any repointing and one or more test panels must be prepared and approved before work can proceed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting or high pressure water blasting or the use of other abrasive materials (soda, nut shells, etc.) on limestone, terra cotta, pressed brick or cream 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. Work should be done by experienced individuals. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any cleaning would begin. The stone at the first floor storefront area may be cleaned.
- 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. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any work would proceed on repairs to the stone and brick.

## 2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. Historic Preservation staff would support the retention of the copper cornice that wraps the building between the first and second story. It appears to have been installed in the 1910 remodeling of the first story. It can be repaired. Should the owner choose to return to the original cornice as illustrated in 1877, consultation with Historic Preservation staff will ensure that appropriate materials and design and construction will result in an authentic appearance. The upper cornice and pediments were removed in the mid-1950s and replaced with signage that read "West Side Bank". This signage was replaced with the letters reading "Sydney Hih" in the early 1970s. New use for the building would most likely require removal of the letters. The owner can choose to exactly replace the original cornice if he would want or to work with Historic Preservation on an appropriate alternative, be that signage or cornice. Historic Preservation staff would support the removal of the metal fire escape on the east elevation if the owner chooses to remove it.

- 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 or metal with aluminum or vinyl is not permitted. As stated above, the copper cornice above the first story is repairable and does not need to be removed.

### 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 windowpanes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible. The storefront configuration as seen today is the result of a 1910 remodeling for the building's second owner, the West Side Bank. An alteration to that storefront was made in the westernmost bay to cut in an entrance at grade. Historic Preservation staff supports retaining the storefront in its 1910 appearance. The stone piers are sound, as are the arches above the corner entry. The owner may restore the west end bay to conformity with the remainder of the storefront if he chooses. Historic Preservation staff also supports and would assist in a complete restoration of the storefront to its 1877 appearance if the owner would choose to do so. A restoration to the 1877 appearance is not required.
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 and material of the original window sash or door. New glass must match the size of the historic glass. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete 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.

Any original windows on the Senn Building should be retained and repaired if at all possible. The 1877 illustration of the building shows that the arched windows were one-over-one sash. Physical evidence, however, shows that windows were originally two-over-two. Some of the windows or portions of the sash were replaced over time and there is now a mix of two-over-two, two-over-one, one-over-two, and one-over-one sash. Historic Preservation staff will work with the owner on appropriate replacement sash. Each era produced different brick mould profiles. The brick mould profiles around the sash here must be retained, as they are an essential feature of the Italianate style. Vinyl or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block basement windows are not permitted where visible from the public right of way. Retain and existing art glass/leaded glass windows that may be located beneath the boarded up windows. Changes to doors and windows require consultation with Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

3. 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. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for this type of installation.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing historic trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. See discussion of cornice and stone above. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance. Essential features of the building such as the brick pilasters, corbelling at the upper level, paneled cornice between the second and third story and corbelled surrounds with keystones around the windows are to be retained. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required before any changes or repairs are made to the trim features.

E. Additions

It is not anticipated that additions will be made to the building's east (King Dr.) and south (Juneau Ave.) elevations because the building sits right at the property line. Rooftop additions have been covered under Roofs. No hanging balconies or projecting bays may be applied to the building at the east and south elevations, as this would adversely affect the building's character defining features. The north and west elevations were mostly blank party walls abutting to adjacent buildings. If the Senn Building is incorporated into new construction care must be taken to preserve the building as a free-standing entity with connectors set back from the main body of the building. Any addition or connector requires the approval of the Commission. Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the building. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of window size and placement, building height, roof configuration, 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. Additions must be smaller than the building and not obscure the historic building.

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

Given that the building occupies its entire site and is bordered by city sidewalks, it is unlikely that landscape features will be incorporated into the property. Should landscape matters come up, consultation with Historic Preservation staff, and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before starting any work.

H. Guidelines for New Construction that Results in Alteration of the Designated Structure

Given that the building occupies its entire site and is bordered by city sidewalks, it is unlikely that there would be room for new construction except in the form of

additions or connectors as discussed above. If new construction would somehow apply to the property, the following guidelines would apply. 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 must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the building. New construction is to be smaller in size and shorter in height than the historic building.

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 that are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the historic building should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on the historic building. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained and materials not available when the house was constructed should be avoided.

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

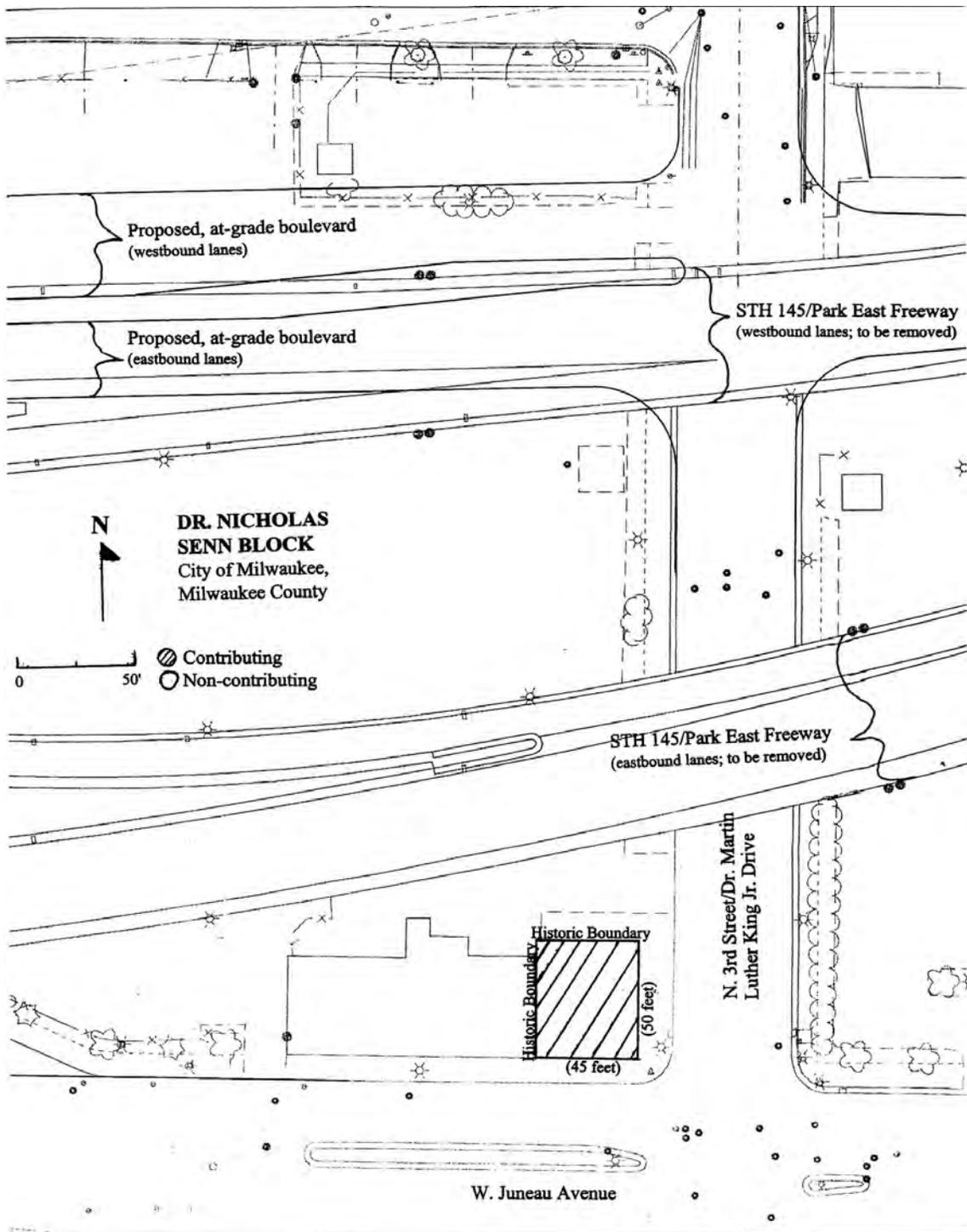
Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

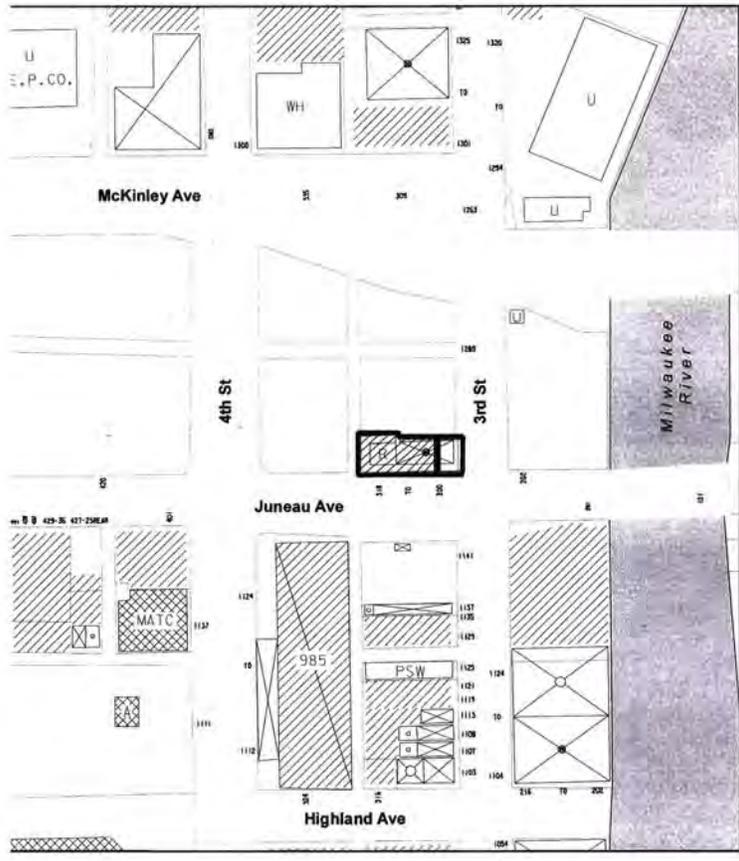
4. Potential for Restoration

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.





**Nicholas Senn Building**  
300 - 318 W Juneau Avenue

 Parcel Boundary

Produced by:  
Department of City Development Information Center, RTW

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