

**FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT**  
**PRITZLAFF HARDWARE COMPANY COMPLEX**

**I. NAME**

Historic: Pritzlaff Hardware Company Complex

Common name: Same

**II. LOCATION**

333 N. Plankinton Ave.

12th Aldermanic District, Ald. Angel Sanchez

Legal Description: Fraction of Lot 6 in SE ¼ Sec 29-7-22 Block 145 Lots 1 thru 7 and 12 thru 18 and all Vac Alleys Exc Parts Lying SWLY of NLY RR Row LI and Lots 1 thru 4 in Subd of Lot 19 in Blk 145 SD ¼ Sec Exc Part Lot 1 Com NE Cor SD Lot 1-Th SWLY 13'-Th NWLY to Pt in N LI & 13' W of NE Cor SD Lot 1-TH E 13' to Pt of Com Bids #2, #21

**III. CLASSIFICATION**

District

**IV. OWNER**

Julius Bernstein IRR Trust  
Sidney Hack IRR Trust  
Harry Hack IRR Trust  
780 N. Water St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

**V. YEAR BUILT**

1875-1919

**ARCHITECTS:** John Rugee: 325 N. Plankinton Avenue  
Ferry and Clas: 311 N. Plankinton Avenue  
Klug and Smith: 305 N. Plankinton Avenue; 333 N. Plankinton Avenue (north half)

**VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

The Pritzlaff Hardware Company complex is an outstanding collection of seven contiguous brick commercial buildings located at the southwest corner of W. St. Paul and N. Plankinton Avenues in downtown Milwaukee. They range in height from four to seven stories and were built between 1875 and 1919. At the firm's peak around 1920, the complex included fifteen buildings spread out over two city blocks. The remaining

buildings, which comprise the historic core of the complex, are the largest, best and oldest structures associated with the firm at this location. All seven buildings are contributing structures.

The complex is an outstanding reminder of the thriving wholesale and commercial trade district that surrounded it throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the last 50 years, however, the character of the area around the complex has changed dramatically. To the east of the Pritzlaff buildings, the vacant half-block strip of land along the Milwaukee River was the site of huge railroad freight houses for the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad and the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee Railway. Also vanished are the boat docks on the Milwaukee River that serviced the thriving Great Lakes maritime trade. To the north of the Pritzlaff complex stands an elevated section of the I-794 freeway, which was built in the 1960s. Hundreds of buildings in the freeway path were razed including several that were owned by the Pritzlaff Company. The central Milwaukee post office, a modern, 1960s structure, was built to the west of the complex on the site of another large railroad freight building. A contemporary gas station is located across the street from the complex at the southeast corner of E. St. Paul and N. Plankinton Avenues.

It is relatively easy to distinguish between most of the buildings in the complex because N. Plankinton Avenue and it is richly embellished with dressed stone, ornamental brickwork, fine architectural sheet metal and superb cast iron work. The north elevation facing W. St. Paul Avenue is also architecturally embellished but to a lesser extent than the Plankinton Ave. side of the complex. The rear and side elevations facing south and west are utilitarian in character composed of plain brick walls with windows and doors that are placed to respond to the needs of the interior.

All of the buildings in the complex are of mill-type construction. This means that the exterior, load-bearing walls are made of solid brick and massive, wooden posts and beams support the floors. The timbers used for the posts and beams throughout the complex are remarkable in terms of their size and quality. All of the wood used in the construction of these structures is virtually irreplaceable because it came from mature, old growth trees that were centuries old when they were cut down. Most of the timbers were carefully selected to be virtually knot-free in order to maximize both the strength and quality of the buildings.

The oldest of the buildings, finished in 1875 according to the designs of John Rugee, is located at 325 N. Plankinton Avenue in the center of the complex. It is an outstanding four-story Italianate style structure made of Milwaukee cream pressed brick. Most of the building's original street level storefront remains intact. It is composed of ornamental cast-iron shafts with paneled wood bulkheads and large plate glass windows between them. Two sets of double leaf entry doors are centered on the storefront. The set of wooden doors appears to be original, and the other, stainless steel entry doors are 1940s replacements.

The second through fourth stories of the building are fenestrated with regularly placed round-arched windows. Each window is trimmed with an ornamental brick hood molding and topped with a carved sandstone keystone. The building is topped off with a superb sheet metal cornice and centered in it is a crescent-shaped ornamental sheet metal gable that features the date of construction, 1875, in raised metal numerals. Centered on the brick frieze beneath the gable is the name "Pritzlaff" in raised, sans-serif metal letters. The building was enlarged in 1879 with a virtually seamless, four-story addition at

315 N. Plankinton Avenue that added 25 feet of street frontage to the south side of the structure. John Rugee may have built the addition but research has not yet identified either a designer or builder.

These two buildings, the oldest in the complex, are nearly intact on the exterior and only very minor alterations have been made over the years. Stainless steel entry doors were installed in the place of one pair of original wooden ones and some original iron, window muntins on the street level storefront were removed to allow the installation of larger plate glass display windows.

The southern-most building in the complex, which is addressed at 305 N. Plankinton Avenue, appears to be one large seven story block but it is actually composed of a four story building and a later addition that was later built around it. The older part of the building, addressed at 311 N. Plankinton Avenue, was built in 1895 according to the designs of Milwaukee architects George Bowman Ferry and Alfred C. Clas. It is a four-story, Commercial Style structure approximately 25 feet wide that was added to the south side of the original, 1875 and 1879 Pritzlaff buildings. It stands out from the later, seven-story block that surrounds it by the slightly different hues of its weathered brick and a narrow, 4-story, vertical parting joint in the masonry. In 1915 three additional stories were added to the top of this building and a massive, seven-story, early twentieth century commercial style structure was built next to it by the Milwaukee engineering firm of Klug and Smith.

The structure as it stands today is composed of cream pressed brick walls and regularly placed double hung windows. It lacks the extensive brick and stone ornament that is common to the other, older buildings in the complex and reflects the architectural trends of its day. The street level storefront is composed of alternating piers of brick and square cast iron shafts. The second through seventh stories are composed of plain brick walls that are fenestrated with regularly placed pairs of double hung windows. The façade is topped with a fine, projecting, bracketed sheet metal cornice that reflects the influence of the Neo-Classical style of architecture that was very popular for early twentieth century commercial buildings.

The four-story, Romanesque Revival style building at the southwest corner of N. Plankinton and E. St. Paul Avenues was built in two sections, years apart from one another. The structure is trimmed with extensive Romanesque-style detailing including basket-style capitals on the storefront columns and carved rope-like window tops that rest on foliated label stops.

The two halves of the building can be discerned by their differing hues of weathered cream brick and modest differences in the color of the ornamental stonework. The first section, completed in 1887, was L-shaped in plan. The building was constructed to wrap around the backsides of three, small, brick buildings that stood at the street corner. Nearly 30 years later those buildings were demolished to make way for an addition to the 1887 building. Both the Plankinton and St. Paul storefronts were about 70 feet wide. Research has not yet identified the designer of the structure.

The addition at the street corner was completed in 1919 according to plans furnished by Klug and Smith, a Milwaukee engineering and architectural firm. Although the Klug and Smith addition is a virtually seamless copy of the southern half of the building, they could not have done the original design because neither partner in the firm was working when the first section was built.

Today, the two structures have the appearance of a single building. The street level storefront is composed of alternating piers of heavy rusticated limestone and thick cast-iron shafts. The main entrance, which is roughly centered on the Plankinton Avenue elevation, was remodeled in 1943 in a vaguely International Style with stainless steel entry doors and pattern-glass transoms and sidelights. The second, third and fourth stories of the building are divided into vertical bays by projecting, brick pilasters. Each bay is fenestrated with a pair of round-arched double hung wooden windows. The building is topped with a projecting, ornamental sheet metal cornice.

The western-most building in the complex at 155 W. St. Paul Avenue is a large, seven-story cream brick, early twentieth century commercial style building that rests on a rusticated limestone basement. It was constructed in 1903 but research has not identified the designer. The building replaced two smaller, two-story brick warehouses.

The first story of the main elevation facing W. St. Paul Avenue is a loading dock composed of five bays of overhead doors that are relatively modern replacements for the original swinging type of doors. An abandoned railroad spur runs north and south completely through the west end of the building. The second through sixth stories are fenestrated with regularly placed double hung wooden windows that are grouped in bays of three. The seventh story is fenestrated with six, evenly spaced double hung windows.

The building is topped with modest brick corbelling. The original cornice, which was probably made of ornamental sheet metal, has been removed. In its place is a simple concrete coping at the top of the wall. In 1912 a bridge-like addition over the alley was built to connect the second, third and fourth stories of this building with the 1887 warehouse located to the east of it at 143 W. St. Paul Avenue.

The interiors throughout the complex are mostly unfinished spaces that feature wooden floors and ceilings that, in turn, are supported by massive posts and beams. Passageways in the basement and on some of the upper floors connect all of the buildings. Still to be seen in the original building at 325 N. Plankinton Avenue are two of the original spiral, metal delivery chutes which were used to send packages to lower floors for shipping. Some of the remaining wooden bins still retain their paper tags with descriptions of the products that were stored in them. A huge, two story, nineteenth century safe is located on the first and second floors in the building at the corner of N. Plankinton and W. St. Paul Avenues. Its main door is handsomely embellished with ornamental metalwork and hand-painted landscape scenes. It probably dates from 1887 when the building was finished at it ranks as one of the most elaborate and largest safes of its time period remaining in the city.

The publicly visible elevations of the complex have remained nearly intact over the years. A few alterations have been made to the storefronts, but for the most part they retain the majority of their original materials and configurations. Some settling of the rear, western wall above the loading dock has occurred over the years and part of the wall has been rebuilt but it does not alter the principal character of the complex.

The Pritzlaff Co. also owned all five brick buildings that stood on the east side of N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street between W. St. Paul Avenue and W. Clybourn Street. They were acquired by the Pritzlaff Company around the turn of the century as the firm grew, but all of them were demolished in the 1960s to make way for the I-794 expressway. Two, side-by-side, brick-venered warehouses that stood at 175 W. St. Paul Avenue were demolished in 1966.

Each measured 50 feet wide and 140 feet deep. The west half of the pair was a single-story structure built in 1890 by Mr. A. Holstein. Research has not yet revealed when the two-story building next to it was constructed. The Pritzlaff Company also owned a large, detached, one story railway freight building, called warehouse Number 8, constructed in 1898 that was located about fifty feet southwest of the existing complex. It, too, has been demolished.

## VI. SIGNIFICANCE

The Pritzlaff Hardware Company complex is architecturally and historically significant to Milwaukee as an outstanding and virtually irreplaceable collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial structures built for one of the city's most prosperous wholesaling firms.

Relatively few complexes associated with the City of Milwaukee's thriving nineteenth century wholesale business remain intact today and of those the Pritzlaff complex is the largest and best. The complex is unique because it reflects both the architectural and commercial development of the city over a period of nearly 50 years. Preservation of these structures is also a top priority because of their visual importance to the City's Central Business District.

## VIII. HISTORY

### Architecture

The complex is architecturally and historically significant because it represents a nearly intact example of the buildings constructed for one of the nation's biggest wholesale hardware companies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although much of the wholesaling trade has vanished from downtown Milwaukee, the Pritzlaff Hardware complex is a remarkable reminder of an industry that had a major influence on the economic, social and architectural development of the city.

The architecture of these imposing structures, which includes many impressive and costly details, reflects the prosperity of Milwaukee's wholesaling business during the late nineteenth century. For the most part, the principal elevations of the buildings are significantly embellished with quality architectural details that include ornamental brickwork, decorative sheet metal and carved stone. All six of the buildings that compose the main, W. Plankinton Avenue elevation are finished with Milwaukee pressed brick that was a much more costly material than common brick.

The oldest building in the complex, completed in 1875 and addressed at 325 N. Plankinton Avenue, is an outstanding Italianate style structure. Only a few Italianate style commercial buildings from the 1870s remain in Milwaukee and of those the Pritzlaff building is one of the largest and best. Trimmed with extensive ornamental brickwork and sheet metal, it is the largest known building still standing that was designed by John Rugee who was one of the city's leading South Side architects during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The carved stone trim around the windows ranks as some of the best remaining Italianate style decorative work of its kind remaining on a Milwaukee commercial building.

Although some modest alterations have been made to the street-level storefront, there have been virtually no alterations made to the rest of the imposing front elevation. The

original iron cornice remains intact, and topping it off are three large cast-iron urns. Although many of the city's 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings were trimmed with decorative iron urns and similar details made in lighter-gauge sheet metal, the urns on the Pritzlaff building are unquestionably the best surviving cast iron details of their kind in the city.

The Romanesque Revival style main building located at the corner of N. Plankinton and W. St. Paul Avenues reflects the lingering influence of the acclaimed Boston architect H. H. Richardson. His robust style of design became known as Richardsonian Romanesque and an outstanding example of his work was the Marshall Field's Warehouse in Chicago that was completed in 1886. The Pritzlaff building is not a true example of the Richardson's own unique style, but it is ornamented with outstanding detailing that is strongly associated with the Romanesque Revival style of architecture that Richardson popularized. Particularly impressive are the so-called basket capitals that top each of the masonry piers on the street level storefront. No other commercial building in the city of Milwaukee features Romanesque style details such as these. Additional Romanesque Revival style details include crocket capitals and distinctive rope-like moldings and foliated label stops that trim the tops of the round-arched windows. All of these are exceptionally fine details associated with the best construction and design techniques of the era.

Richardson's design for the Field's Warehouse (razed) represented a milestone in midwestern architecture and it is likely to have influenced the architects who designed the Pritzlaff warehouse and office. The Pritzlaff building is not a true example of Richardson's style but it is one of the few extant reminders in Milwaukee of the architect's influence on the history of American architecture.

H. H. Richardson (1838-1886), who based his work primarily on the Romanesque architecture of southern France, initiated the so-called Richardsonian Romanesque style. His bold and effervescent style also drew significantly upon Byzantine and English Victorian Gothic sources. Richardson's design work caused a sensation among many American architects who began to emulate his style during the mid-1870s. Although the style was employed throughout the country it was especially popular around Boston where Richardson had his office and in the growing midwestern cities of Chicago, Milwaukee and Cleveland. After Richardson died in 1886 his practice was subsequently taken over by the firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. This firm and many others around the country went on producing Richardson-influenced work of varying quality until the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The large, seven-story structure at 305 N. Plankinton Avenue, built in 1895 and 1915, is a fine example of the commercial style of architecture that popular at the turn of the century. The building's flat, and relatively unornamented walls are a clear departure from the earlier structures in the complex that derive a considerable amount of their visual interest from projecting brick pilasters and ornamental stonework. However, each lintel over the double hung windows on the second through seventh stories is made of bricks that were honed to wedge-like shapes. Usually called "splayed brick" this detail is a time-consuming and costly one to effect.

The fact that the street level storefronts in the complex have been little altered and retain much of their original character is particularly remarkable. The construction of the storefront at 325 N. Plankinton Avenue caught the attention of a writer for the Milwaukee Sentinel who reported on May 27, 1875, "Workmen are putting up the iron columns of the front of Pritzlaff's new block on West Water Street," [North Plankinton, today]. The

original iron piers and panels are still intact today. Very few nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings in Milwaukee retain their original, street level storefronts. The Pritzlaff shop fronts have been modestly altered in places, but for the most part they are a unique collection of the city's turn of the century storefront design.

### **Milwaukee Cream Brick**

The Pritzlaff Hardware Company buildings are also significant because they are among the dwindling number of structures made from Milwaukee's unique cream-colored brick that is an inseparable part of the city's history. In the late nineteenth century, the large number of buildings in Milwaukee made from the impressive, golden-colored brick earned the city its "Cream City" nickname. Cream brick, however, has not been manufactured since the 1920s making the remaining structures made of this material an increasingly valuable part of the city's architectural history and its civic pride.

Milwaukee's first brickyard opened for business in 1835 or 1836. The first brick makers thought that red brick would result after firing the red-brown Milwaukee clay, but an unusually high content of calcium and magnesium in the clay gave the brick a unique soft yellow color instead. The cream brick, as it became to be known, grew in popularity in Milwaukee and the city's brick makers took great pride in their unique product.

In May of 1859 the schooner M.S. Scott sailed to Germany carrying, among other things, samples of Milwaukee's cream brick to the mayor of Hamburg. The Germans were impressed with the Milwaukee brick and later imported some of it for use in ornamenting their new buildings. It is not known if there are any buildings surviving in Germany today that feature Milwaukee's cream brick. The popularity of Milwaukee cream brick was reflected by the fact that as late as the 1920s, The Pittsburgh Paint and Glass Co., which was a large paint manufacturer, headquartered in the east, sold a ready-mixed house paint in a creamy color called "Milwaukee brick."

### **Architects/Engineers**

#### **John Rugee**

John Rugee (1827-1894) was an energetic, German-born pioneer whose accomplishments as a builder, architect, inventor and politician played a significant role in the early development of the City of Milwaukee. Mr. Rugee was born in Lubeck, Germany and at an early age he showed an aptitude for drawing and designing. His parents, Christopher and Christina, wanted to nurture their son's talent and they arranged for private tutors to instruct him between 1832 and 1839. Christopher Rugee was a successful locksmith and bell maker.

In 1839 Christopher took his son John and daughter Ann to America for a visit. They stayed in New York for several months before Christopher and John returned to Germany, gathered the rest of the family together, and brought them all back to America where they began a new life in 1840.

The family settled on a farm in Ulster County, New York but after only a year young John tired of the work and left to become an apprentice carpenter in Poughkeepsie, New York. Upon completing a three-year apprenticeship he became a journeyman carpenter and worked in the East constructing bridges, breweries and grain elevators.

Christopher Rugee also gave up farming and in 1846 he moved his family to Milwaukee and set up a business as a bell maker and locksmith at N. 11<sup>th</sup> and W. Vliet Streets. John Rugee, who no longer lived with his family, continued to work as a journeyman carpenter and eventually arrived in Milwaukee in 1851. He found work as a construction superintendent for Stoddard Martin who specialized in building bridges and grain elevators. In 1853 Mr. Rugee formed a partnership with Mr. Martin and they were known as architects, builders and manufacturers of sashes, doors and blinds. Mr. Rugee also enjoyed modest success as an inventor and designed a special machine that cut off old wooden pilings beneath the water line to assist with the construction of new bridges.

Mr. Rugee worked initially as a builder and later, beginning in 1853, as both an architect and builder until the early 1880s. The extent of Mr. Rugee's formal training as an architect is not known, however it was not uncommon at that time for an experienced carpenter and builder to assume the duties of a practicing architect.

When Mr. Martin died in 1865, Mr. Rugee continued the business by himself until 1872 when he entered into a new partnership with Emil Durr. Their firm, Durr and Rugee, became a leading wholesale and retail dealer in lumber, lath and shingles. Mr. Rugee also developed an outstanding reputation as an architect of commercial buildings and between 1872 and 1880 he was supervising architect for the Schiltz, Best, and Falk Brewing Companies in Milwaukee. It was during the years of his brewery work that Mr. Rugee designed and built the large, 4-story Italianate style commercial building for John Pritzlaff at 325 N. Plankinton Ave. The Pritzlaff building is the only known remaining building that Mr. Rugee designed in downtown Milwaukee.

Mr. Rugee also had a keen interest in politics and in 1855 he was elected to a part-time post as Milwaukee alderman. He was re-elected in 1857 and then in 1860 moved on to win a seat on the State Legislature. He returned to his business interests after serving his term that but he re-entered the political area again in 1882 and won a very close race for Milwaukee County Sheriff.

Mr. Rugee fell into poor health in 1893 and he went to California accompanied by his wife and son in December of that year hoping to regain his health through a change of climate. He died in Redlands, California on March 7, 1894. He is buried in Milwaukee's Forest Home Cemetery.

Mr. Rugee was highly influential in shaping the city's architecture during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Several of his buildings remain standing, but the Pritzlaff building is by far the largest and one of the most intact. Another excellent example of his design work is St. Peter's Lutheran School located at 1204 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, which was completed in 1879 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing structure in the St. Peter's Lutheran Church complex. His other design credits include the first public school house on the near south side, which was completed in 1859 (razed), and numerous churches, bridges and commercial buildings.

## Ferry and Clas

George Bowman Ferry (1851-1918) and Alfred Clas (1859-1942) were partners in one of Milwaukee's most creative and busiest architectural firms at the close of the nineteenth century. Their design work includes the Steinmeyer Building (1893) at 1050 N. Old World Third St.; the Milwaukee Central Library (1897) at 814 W. Wisconsin Avenue; the Northwestern National Insurance Building (1906) at 526 E. Wisconsin



Avenue; and the Gustav Pabst House (1906) at 2230 N. Terrace Avenue. Mr. Ferry was the architect of the Pabst Mansion (1893) at 2000 W. Wisconsin Ave. although historians believe that Alfred Clas is likely to have corroborated in the design process. Each of these buildings is a Milwaukee-designated landmark or contained within a landmark district.

Mr. Ferry was born and educated in Springfield, Massachusetts. Between 1871 and 1872 he studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then began an architectural career in his hometown. Mr. Ferry moved to Milwaukee in 1881 with his wife Cora Frances Phillips. In 1890 Mr. Ferry went into partnership with Alfred C. Clas and opened an architectural office on N. Broadway between E. Wisconsin Avenue and E. Mason Street. Their partnership lasted until 1912 and the two were responsible for many of the city's major architectural projects.

Mr. Ferry continued his own architectural practice until about 1916. During the years he worked alone he helped to organize Wisconsin's first architectural association, and was a member of the committee that framed the by-laws and constitution of the American Institute of Architects. He also served as president of the Milwaukee Art Commission and as chairman for four years of the Milwaukee's building code commission. During his years in Milwaukee Mr. Ferry moved frequently and last lived on N. Cambridge Street on the city's Lower East Side. He died on January 28, 1918 at the residence of son, Robert P. Ferry at 1502 E. Royal Place. Alfred Clas, in a eulogy to his former partner, stated that Mr. Ferry "was one of the best designers ever in Milwaukee."

**Alfred Clas** was born in the small rural community of Sauk City, Wisconsin to German immigrant parents. He went to school in his hometown and served a short appointment as a messenger boy in the State Senate after graduating from high school. Mr. Clas then entered into an architectural apprenticeship and received two years of practical instruction in building construction. In 1879 he moved to Stockton, California where he worked for about two years in an architect's office. Mr. Clas then moved to Milwaukee and from about 1880 to 1884 he worked his way up from draftsman to architect in the office of James Douglas. From 1885 to 1886 the two men were in partnership but Mr. Clas left in 1887 to set up his own practice and then went into partnership with George Ferry in 1890.

After his partnership with Mr. Ferry dissolved in 1912, Mr. Clas formed a partnership with his son Angelo R. Clas that lasted until 1921. Mr. Clas then formed a new partnership, Clas, Shepherd and Clas, with his son Rubens and John S. Shepherd. The partnership remained intact until about 1931 when Mr. Clas apparently began to decrease his participation in the firm. Then, in 1933 during the depths of the Great Depression, the firm was changed to a corporation called Clas and Clas, Inc. Mr. Clas subsequently retired from active participation in the firm but served as its president through 1936. The business remained active under Rubens Clas well into the 1940s.

Following his retirement, Mr. Clas and his second wife, Lucille, spent most of their time in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. After Lucille's death in 1939, Mr. Clas returned to Milwaukee to live with his son Rubens. The last year of his life was spent at the Masonic Home in Dousman where he was recovering from a fall on icy pavement. Mr. Clas died from complications of his accident on July 8, 1942 at the age of 82.

## Klug and Smith

The engineering and construction firm of Klug and Smith began in 1912 as a partnership between **Leberecht Julius Klug and Fred W. Smith**. In 1917 the firm became a corporation and did a flourishing business in the design and construction of bridges and industrial structures.

Mr. Klug was born in Milwaukee on January 9, 1876 and his parents, Leberecht and Wilhelmina, were German immigrants who came to America in 1867. The Klugs sent their son to Milwaukee area schools and then the University of Wisconsin where he earned a degree in civil engineering. During the decade after his college education, Mr. Klug changed jobs frequently and gained valuable experience working as an engineer in Milwaukee and Chicago.

Mr. Klug's first job after college was in Chicago as a bridge draftsman for the American Bridge Works. After working there for about a year he returned to Milwaukee to work for another bridge and building firm, the J. G. Wagner Company but then returned to the American Bridge Works of Chicago and helped to open a Milwaukee office for the firm. Next, his career took him to a different Milwaukee engineering firm, the Worden-Allen Company, where he gained two years of experience before moving on to work with the Milwaukee Bridge Company as an assistant engineer and chief draftsman. His career advanced further when he landed a job as an assistant city engineer for the City of Milwaukee and after two years he was appointed the city's first superintendent of bridges and public buildings. Anxious to start his own firm, however, he left the employ of the city to begin a partnership with Fred Smith in 1912.

Their firm made a specialty of designing bridges and industrial plants. Examples of their design and engineering work include the North Avenue Bridge over the Milwaukee River (demolished) and a large part of the Jones Island Sewerage plant in Milwaukee. They also designed and built the heat treating building for the U. S. Government at the Allis Chalmers plant in West Allis; the waterworks pumping station for the city of Kenosha; the Michigan Street Bascule Bridge in Milwaukee (demolished) and the Wells Street Bascule Bridge (demolished). The Pritzlaff building at 305 N. Plankinton Avenue built in 1915 is probably one of the oldest extant large commercial buildings that the firm designed and built. Research is continuing into the work and life of Fred W. Smith.

## The Pritzlaff Family

**John Pritzlaff** (1820-1900) was the patriarch of one of Milwaukee's well-known German-American families and the founder of the Pritzlaff Hardware Co. Mr. Pritzlaff, his son Frederick and later his grandson Edward succeeded each other as the company's president during its 108-year history.

Mr. Pritzlaff was born in Pomerania, Prussia which is now a region located in northeastern Germany and northwestern Poland. He came to America in 1839 and worked as a laborer in western New York State for two years before coming to Milwaukee. His first work in the city was as a teamster for Milwaukee pioneer Daniel Richards and during the summer of 1842 he served as a cook aboard a Great Lakes schooner.

In 1843 he began working in the hardware business as a porter for the firm of Shepardson and Farwell. His first year's salary was only \$200. The store was

purchased by Nazro and King in 1844 and Mr. Pritzlaff continued working for the new owners until 1850 when he and his partner August Suelflohn opened their own small retail hardware store, called John Pritzlaff and Co., at 299 Third Street. Mr. Pritzlaff's former employer, Henry Nazro, reportedly provided substantial working capital for the business but was not active in the day-to-day operation of the firm.

Business at the store grew steadily and in 1861 Mr. Pritzlaff had a new, 4-story brick building constructed which is still standing today at 1033 N. Old World Third Street. In 1866 his success enabled him to buy out his partners and then continue the business as a single proprietorship and later as a corporation under the name John Pritzlaff Hardware Company. Mr. Pritzlaff's keen business acumen prompted him to branch out beyond retail sales and delve into the lucrative wholesale hardware trade.

During the economic boom of the post-Civil War years, the wholesale end of his business became so successful that he decided to pursue it almost exclusively. In 1874 he bought land at Plankinton and St. Paul Avenues and constructed the first of seven buildings in the massive wholesale complex that still stands there today. He continued to operate his retail store on Third Street for a brief period, but sold it at least by 1877 and conducted retail sales from his wholesale complex.

Mr. Pritzlaff married Sophia Bluhme of Milwaukee in 1844 and they had three daughters and one son. The Pritzlaff family was actively involved in the operation of the business throughout its history and Mr. Pritzlaff was the president of the firm during his lifetime. His son, Frederick, and his daughters' husbands, H. A. Luedke, John C. Koch, and Frank Wollaeger all held important positions in the business.

Mr. Pritzlaff is also important to the city's history because he played a significant role in building Trinity Lutheran Church where he was a member. The church, located at 1046 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street, is considered one of the nation's best examples of German-inspired, High Victorian Gothic style architecture. In 1868 he gave the congregation the large lot where the present church was completed in 1880. His generous contributions were also pivotal to the construction and embellishment of the magnificent church building which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and will soon be a Milwaukee-designated landmark.

The Pritzlaff Co. became one of the nation's biggest wholesale hardware firms and by 1931 more than 450 employees worked in the complex. At that time the firm was also advertising itself as "the oldest wholesale hardware house in the northwest." The Pritzlaff Co. remained a family-controlled firm up to the time it went out of business in 1958. After Mr. Pritzlaff died in 1900 his son Frederick C. Pritzlaff became the president. At the time the business folded, Frederick's son, Edward F. Pritzlaff, was the president of the firm and Fred F. Luedke, a grandson of the founder, was the vice-president.

Shortly after the Pritzlaff Company folded, the complex was purchased by Hack's Furniture and it was then used as a retail store and warehouse until the late 1980s. When the furniture business closed around 1990, a large part of the first floor became an antique mall that subsequently went out of business in the late 1990s. Today the complex is mostly vacant although parts of it are used for commercial storage. The buildings are presently owned by the Hack Family Trust and the complex is for sale. Several investors are reportedly interested in renovating the complex for offices and retail shops.

## Wholesaling

The Pritzlaff Hardware complex is an imposing reminder of the city's thriving wholesale business. Wholesaling became an important business in Milwaukee after the Civil War mainly because of the city's favorable geographic location and its convenient transportation services. Milwaukee was one of the few big cities on the Great Lakes that had both a large port and extensive rail facilities. After the Civil War the city became a strategic transfer point between the growing agricultural regions in the northwestern part of the country and factories in Europe and the eastern U.S.

During the late nineteenth century much of Milwaukee's wholesale trade was concentrated in an area known today as the Third Ward which is roughly bounded by the Milwaukee River on the west and south, E. St. Paul Avenue on the north, and N. Milwaukee Street on the east. This location was close to the city's lake port and was served by two major railroad lines, the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago and North Western. The area was also adjacent to the city's retailing center along Wisconsin Ave and the great manufacturing hub in the Menomonee River valley.

The city's major hardware wholesalers were concentrated just west of the Third Ward between the Milwaukee River and North Third Street. The Pritzlaff Company was by far the largest and most prosperous of the city's wholesale hardware firms. At its peak around 1920 the business occupied 15 buildings and nearly two square downtown blocks.

The Frankfurth Hardware Company, another large firm, was located two blocks north of Pritzlaff at 521 N. Plankinton Avenue. The Frankfurth Company was in business until 1978 and the building was demolished about two years later. The Suefflohn & Seefeld Co. was located at 413 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in a large, six story building that was constructed for them in 1894. In 1933 the building went to another hardware wholesaler, Shadboldt and Boyd, and although that firm has subsequently gone out of business, the building is still standing and it was recently converted to apartments.

Other wholesale hardware firms in the downtown area around the turn of the century include: The Wholesale Hardware, Iron and Steel Co. located immediately south of the original Pritzlaff building in the 300 block of N. Plankinton Avenue (razed); Hilgendorf, Killoge and Co. located in the 600 block of N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (razed); and the Peter Paulis Hardware Co., which had two locations, one at 1209 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the other near the northwest corner of N. 3<sup>rd</sup> and W. Kilbourn Avenue (razed).

By the 1880s wholesaling was at its peak in Milwaukee with merchants supplying a vast assortment of products that included hardware, machine tools, millwork liquor, beer, dry goods, food and leather products. Many of the products were shipped to growing regions in the Northwest and West where Milwaukee, because of its transportation advantages, could offer prices that were often lower than its competitors' in other cities.

In the 1890s Milwaukee's importance as a transfer point and wholesaling center began to decline due to increased competition from the Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul markets. Wholesaling remained a significant occupation in Milwaukee after the turn of the century and in 1900 it was still the most common type of business activity in the downtown area according to the census taken that year. Following the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II activity in the city's downtown wholesaling district declined due to competition from other cities and the rise of truck transportation. Many

wholesalers left the downtown area when their buildings were demolished to make way for freeway construction. Wholesaling continues to be an important part of the economy in the metropolitan Milwaukee area. In the downtown area, the Third Ward retains some of its historic reputation as a fruit and produce wholesale center. Much of the area's wholesaling activity, however, has dispersed to newer, far-flung suburban areas.

## IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Pritzlaff Hardware Co. complex be considered for designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-1 It 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 distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.
- e-6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, interior designer, craftsperson, or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or the United States.
- e-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City of Milwaukee.

### References

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **May 27, 1875** page 8, column 2:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **Oct. 26, 1875** page 8, column 2:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **Dec. 31, 1875** page 2, column 3:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **July 8, 1886** page 3, column 3:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **June 28, 1887** page 3, column 1:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **August 27, 1887** page 3 column 1:

*Milwaukee Sentinel* **September 7, 1887** page 3 column 3:

History of Milwaukee. Volume III. Milwaukee: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co. 1922

History of Milwaukee Wisconsin. John G. Gregory Volume III and Milwaukee: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co. 1931.

Fire Insurance Maps of Milwaukee, 1876, 188 1894, 1910.

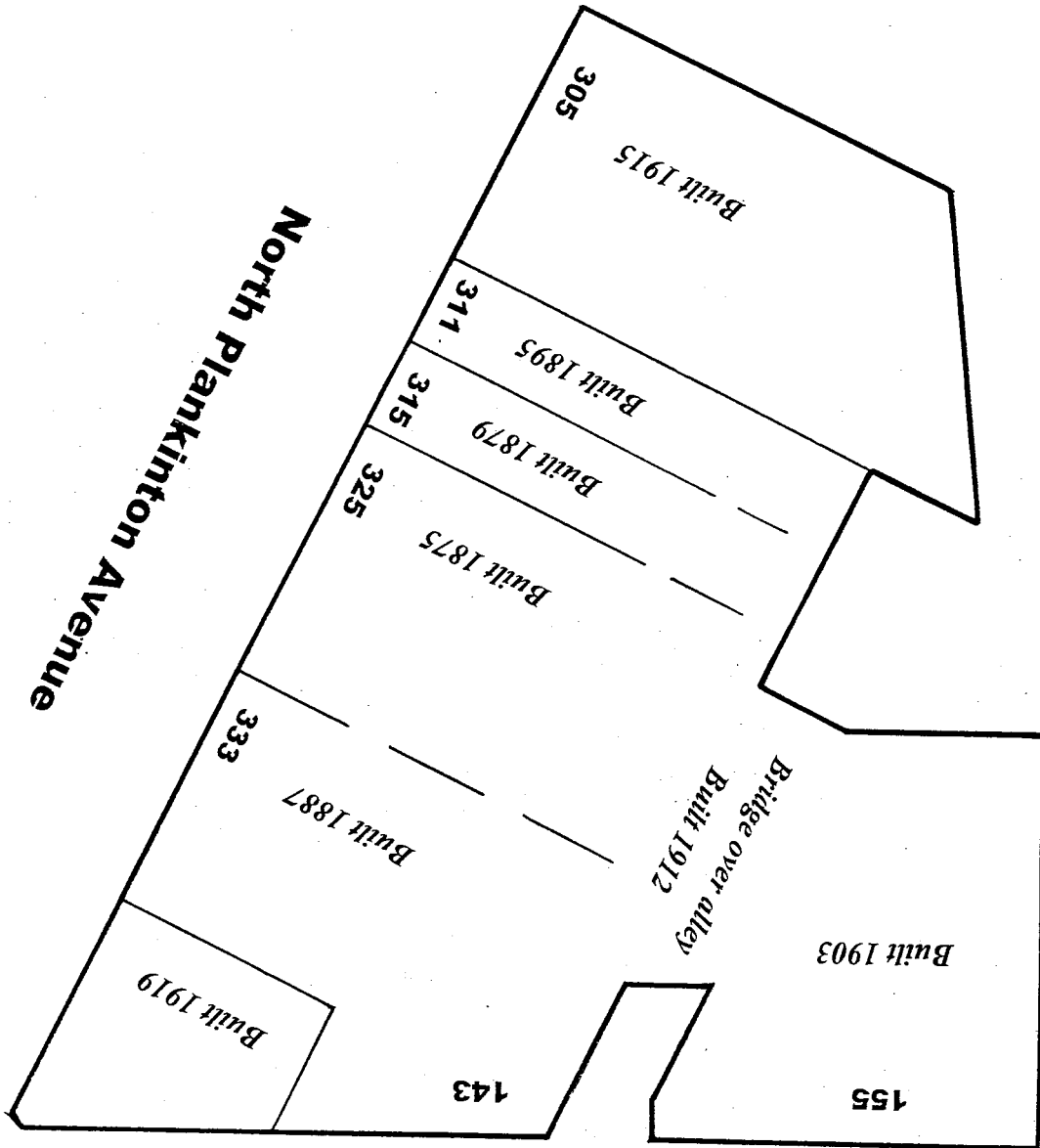
City of Milwaukee Building Permit Records

Pritzlaff Hardware Co. 75th Anniversary booklet



John Pritzlaff Hardware Company Complex  
333 N. Plankinton Avenue

Plan of complex  
Scale 50:1



West St. Paul Avenue

**X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES**

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

**A. Roofs**

Retain the original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the buildings' heights, rooflines or pitches.

**B. Materials**

**1. Masonry**

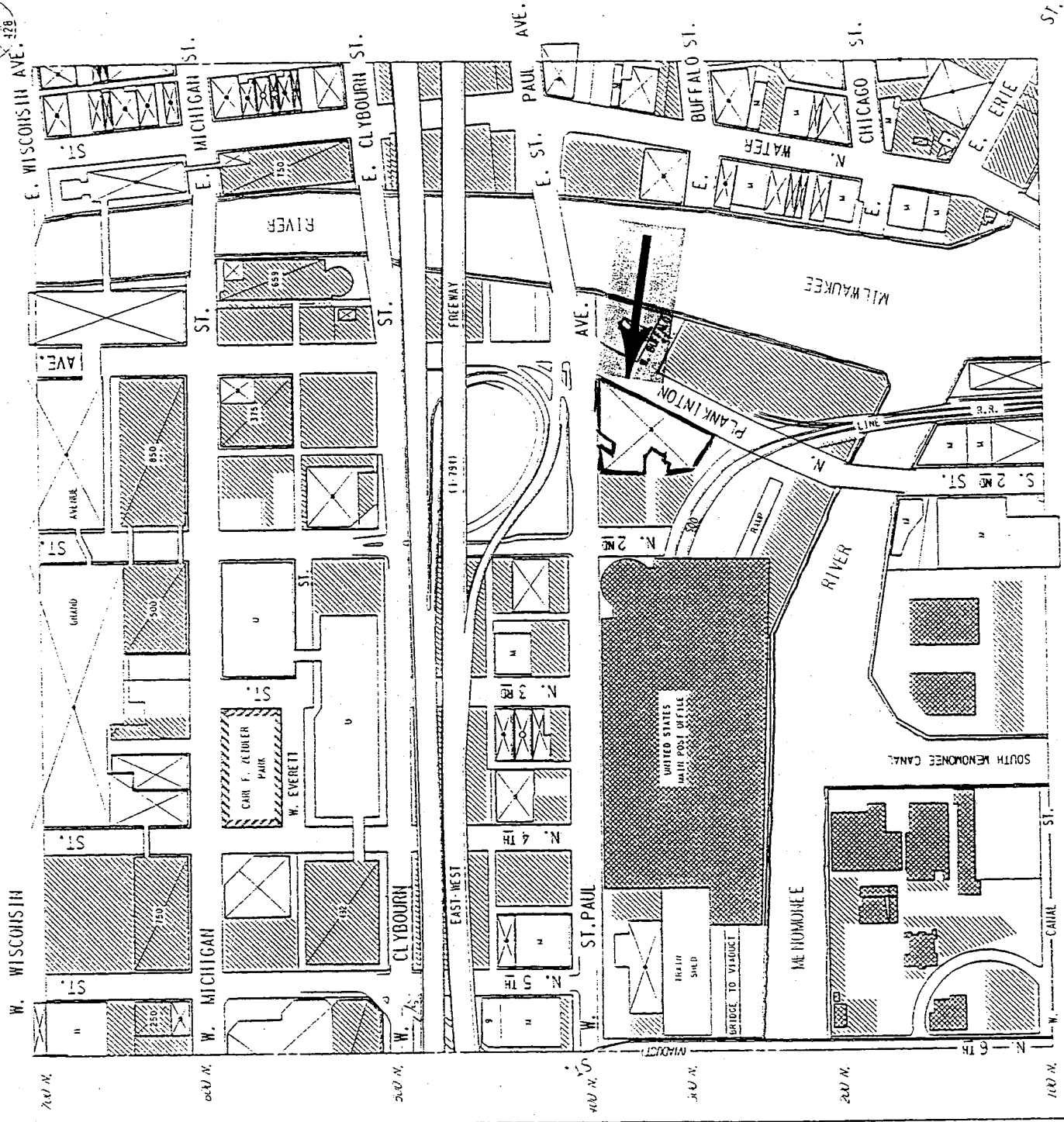
- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective or deteriorated mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles, which were unavailable or were not used when the buildings were constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive blasting to brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. These methods of cleaning erode the surface of the material and accelerate deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the buildings. 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 materials that duplicate the hold as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is in appropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

**2. Wood/Metal**

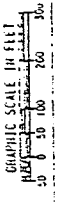
- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. Retaining all original cornices whenever possible and repair-replacement should match the original work as closely as possible. Retain the original iron urns atop the original building at 325 N. Plankinton Ave.

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- 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 are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed. The use of vinyl or aluminum trim or siding is prohibited

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.
2. Respect the stylistic period during which the complex was built. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or doors. Avoid using inappropriate sash and replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as concrete block or glass block. Avoid using modern style sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the exiting trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance, but not necessarily in material.

E. Additions

All elevations of the complex are important to its architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require 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 and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Signs

The installation of any 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. No internally illuminated box sign will be approved.

G. Site features

New plant materials. Fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the complex.

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 complex.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the complex. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the complex from the street as a group of contiguous, stylistically compatible structures.

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 proximity to historic buildings must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the buildings.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the complex as a cohesive group of historic structures. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from any new construction in the complex should express the same design continuity established in the historic complex.

4. Materials

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

1. 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 Commission shall take the following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, into consideration 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 original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

