

U.W. Milwaukee
Alumni House Baseline Documentation for
Wisconsin Historical Society
December 2020



UW Milwaukee
Office of Campus Planning and
Management
414 229-5390
UWM.edu/campus-planning/

1. Location and Legal Description of the Alumni House

THE LAND IS DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS

(the legal description)

The East 50 feet of Lots 5 and all of Lots 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, in Lake Park Addition of a part of Lot 4 in fractional Southeast 1/4 of Section 10, Town 7 North, Range 22 East, in the City of Milwaukee, County of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin.

Property Address: 3230 East Kenwood Boulevard, Milwaukee, WI 53211

For informational purposes only:

Tax Key Number: 278-0403-000

2. Copy of the National Register form or other formal documentation of historic significance.

The Myron T. MacLaren House, also known as the UWM Alumni House, 3230 East Kenwood Boulevard was designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5, e-6 and e-7 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances on December 20, 1991 (Resolution 911564). It has not been placed on the National or Wisconsin Register of Historic Places. See Attachment 1.

3. Significant Design Elements

The Myron T. MacLaren House is widely considered to be the finest Tudor style house in the Milwaukee area. According to H. Russell Zimmerman, local architectural historian, this opinion is “the refinement of design, materials, its good state of preservation and location.” (Magnificent Milwaukee, p. 231)

Resting on an approximately 3.9 acre lot located on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, the MacLaren House is a rambling, 2 1/2 –story, English Tudor mansion faced with imported brown Plymouth stone and covered with a tall, gabled, variegated, green and purple Vermont slate roof pierced by numerous chimneystacks with tall chimney pots. (Note: roof was replaced in 2011 using historically appropriate materials. A COA is on file in the offices of the State of Wisconsin Division of Facilities Development and

Management). The entry front facing the lawn is fenestrated with numerous leaded casement windows of various sizes.

Key features of the asymmetrical front façade include an arched loggia opening off the drawing room, the main entrance recessed within an arched portal, the massive staircase oriel and the crenellated corner tower containing the entrance to the service wing.

The exterior of the house features many hand-wrought decorative features. Among the outstanding materials evident are the imported Plymouth quartzite on the exterior; rainwater heads, downspouts and gutters made of lead sheet; copper flashing on the roof and hand carved sandstone details (often drawn from the animal kingdom) are located in various exterior places. The green and purple Vermont slate roof is constructed in the English late medieval fashion featuring thick rough-cut slate at the bottom above the eaves slowly tapering to thinner pieces of slate at the ridges.

High quality workmanship is evident in the carved sandstone window castings, drip moulds, numerous small figural carvings, and the armorial escutcheon over the staircase oriel window. The house's leaded glass windows feature highly ornamental leaded glazing patterns and all of the 12 original antique hand-painted heraldic panels incorporated into the leaded glass sash.

The original property included the largest privately-owned swimming pool in Wisconsin, a sunken garden and tennis courts. Scores of mature Elm trees once adorned the property. The passage of time and budget limitations resulted in the swimming pool being filled-in and the tennis courts removed. The outline of the pool remains and is visible. The Elm trees were cut down due to Dutch Elm Disease.

The plan for the house included a garage that was never built, although the foundations and an underground tunnel connecting the house to the basement were constructed. An added quantity of the Plymouth Stone used on the house was purchased for the garage and remains buried on the site and available for use if and when a garage is built.

The interior featured wrought iron locks and door-sets, many of which have been removed over time and imported cast-iron firebacks. All of the wood trim on the first and second floors are oak except for the paneling in the dining room which is walnut. The paneling in the living room is oak and is modeled on the Elizabethan style attached to a frame of stiles and rails. The crystal chandelier in the dining room was imported from France and is said to have been brought to America in five suitcases.

4. Description of physical evolution of the property.

The property was owned by Myron T and Gertude MacClaren from 1923 until Mr. MacClaren's death in 1941 at which time Gertrude was the sole owner. She remarried and in February 1951, sold the property to the Board of Regents of Normal Schools for use by the Milwaukee State Teacher's College. The Milwaukee State Teacher College later became part of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The house was purchased for use as a women's residence hall. It was during that early time of ownership that the 1st and 2nd floor porch facing Lake Michigan was closed in and a fire stair constructed. (see 100R, 200R and 300S in floor plans)

Fire doors were also installed during university ownership (see B1B, B1U, 100R,200A, 200E, 300R, 300S)

A fence at the top of the bluff was erected in the 1970s to keep people off the beach which had, apparently, become a popular place for beach fires and parties at night.

Also, in the 1970s twin 30" diameter concrete pipes were laid across the property to the south and west of the house to draw water from and return used water to Lake Michigan to the UWM Heat Plant during cooling season. A concrete pump house was constructed at the bottom of the bluff to house the pumps and control equipment. The house was not affected by this project.

At times unknown, the swimming pool was fenced in, the tennis courts removed and a small parking lot immediately south of the house was constructed.

The slate roof was replaced in 2011 according to historic restoration standards and a Certificate of Appropriateness from the City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission is on file in the offices of the Wisconsin Division of Facilities Development and Management.

5. Assessment of current physical condition of the property as known or as observed visually.

Current physical condition of Tudor Revival character-defining features of the building and significant design elements.

The "Naturalistic" approach of stone and slate materials rising out of the ground in a sprawling parklike setting overlooking Lake Michigan remains intact albeit in need of care and repair. The stone façade is in good condition with a mellow patina of weathering. Oriel windows and tall, mullioned windows and doors bringing light deep into the home have stained stone frames and metal glazing frames that need adjustment and repair to make them operable. The steeply pitched roof with copper gutters, battlement parapets and dormers for third floor rooms are in good condition. The high clustered chimneys remain intact, but functionality is unknown since the fireplaces have not been used in many years. Most of the carved stone details, such as a reclining lion, a porcupine, or a squirrel, and ornamental elements have dark stains. The round arched pillared porch outside the garden room is in fair condition with visible cracks, dry timbering, and stained stucco. Fan motif decorative stone on the porch is in good condition. Ornamental wood columns at windows and half timbering areas have rotted sections that need repair.

The grounds are overgrown in many areas, with aging trees that require attention. Stone landscape walls at the garden and patio have shifted with the weather requiring rebuilding. The stone patio is shifted and overgrown. Regrading is needed in many areas and overgrown shrubbery and plantings need attention. The circle drive and parking lot are in poor condition. A chain link fence separates the house from the lakefront at the top of the bluff.

A half-timbered reception hall and adjacent large staircase are the focal point inside the main entrance. The condition is generally fair except for the steel windows and doors that barely operate. Utilitarian carpeting is out of place and accent light fixtures have been added to the room.

Extensive stile and rail wood paneling remains intact, oak in the living and walnut in the dining room, including hidden storage areas, crown moldings and sizable pockets for heavy draperies. A spectacular crystal chandelier from Paris remains in the dining room. Stained glass heraldic crests in stained glass, showing refinement of hand painted detail, decorate windows throughout the house.

The bright and airy garden room with full height south facing windows, in need of repair. A limited number of cracks in the stone floor shows signs of settlement.

The pair of kitchens have some of the original cabinetry and plumbing fixtures that are worn and unreliable.

The bedrooms on the second and third floors were most recently used as offices. These have utilitarian carpeting and walls in need of surface repair. Wood casework and doors original to the home remain, some stained, some painted. Most of the bathroom fixtures and tile floors and walls are in questionable condition. Some have not been operational for decades. Some have been replaced to have usable fixtures.

Grounds: Shrubs and trees are somewhat overgrown, bluff is stable, asphalt parking lot is in fair condition, Fences on south and west sides of property are worn and need to be repaired or replaced.

Exterior of House: Stone exterior is in good condition. Roof is in excellent condition having been replaced in 2011. Windows are single pane. Noticeable air leaking was observed in living room, dining room and master bedroom. It is safe to assume most of the windows are poorly sealed against air infiltration.

Structure: The structure is sound. No cracks observed in walls or foundations. No observable signs of sagging or listing of vertical members. The Play Room in the basement and the adjacent work rooms showed signs of water inflow after a summer rain. Walls in the basement Playroom show signs of long-term water seepage although the poured concrete foundation walls appear to be sound.

Heating: House is heated with two boilers. Boilers need to be replaced in the very near future. Radiators throughout the house appear to be original and some problems with heat and leaking have been reported.

Cooling: No central air conditioning. Some rooms have window air conditioners added during UWM's time of ownership.

Plumbing: Plumbing appears to be original galvanized pipe. Everything appears to be in working order but decades of hard water flowing through the pipes are certain to have caused considerable scale to build up inside the pipes and restricting the water flow.

Electrical: Electrical service was upgraded some time during UWM's ownership of the house. No observed problems.

Flooring: The exposed hardwood floors appear in good condition. The foyer and many of the rooms on 2nd and 3rd floors are carpeted. Carpeting is in fair to good condition but may be covering hardwood floors.

Fireplaces: The 5 fireplaces in the house have not been used in decades. Their condition is unknown.

6. Site plans and floor plans of the property.

Several documents are provided separately to this summary as listed below.

- Original Plans for the house circa 1920 (Attachment 2)
- Site drawing circa 1972 (Exhibit 1)
- Floor plan line drawings of the house depicting modifications to original building and providing a key to the photos. (Attachment 3)

7. One set of exterior and interior photographs.

The photos are provided separately in hard copy and digital formats.

Bibliography

Zimmerman, H. Russell
Magnificent Milwaukee: Architectural Treasures 1850-1920
Milwaukee Public Museum 1987