

Historic Designation Study Report



Frederick T. & Eleanor Goll House

1550 N. Prospect Avenue

City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development
Winter, 2002

Revised Edition Late February 2002

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ADDENDUM

Following the preparation and initial distribution of this report, on February 22, 2002 the elaborate hand-carved wooden bargeboards on the side elevations of the house were permanently removed and the carved plancher boards beneath them were covered with plywood. The loss of these features is significant but does not alter the conclusions in this report about the overall historical and architectural significance of the building.

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT
FREDERICK T. & ELEANOR GOLL HOUSE

I. NAME

Historic: Frederick T. & Eleanor Goll House
Common name: Same

II. LOCATION

1550 North Prospect Avenue

4th Aldermanic District, **Ald. Paul Henningsen**

Legal Description: Rogers' Addn in SE ¼ Sec 21-7-22 Vol 1 p 40 Block 199 (SW 61.35' Lot 12 Sd Subd & NE 38.75' Lot 8 Ronalds Subd) exc RR & Nwly 7' for St

III. CLASSIFICATION Structure

OWNER: 1550 North Prospect LLC
Attn: Dean Fenske
W6249 Creek Rd.
Random Lake, WI 53075

V. DESIGNATION REQUESTED BY: Donna Schlieman

VI. YEAR BUILT: 1898¹

ARCHITECTS: George Ferry and Alfred Clas²

¹ Milwaukee Building Permit #701 dated August 1, 1898. Filed at Development Center, 809 North Broadway, Milwaukee.

² Ibid.

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Introduction



The Goll House is embellished with exquisite hard-carved stonework, such as this large panel in the parapet that tops a front bay window.

The Goll house was one of the finest houses in Milwaukee when it was completed more than a century ago and that is still true today. It was meticulously designed to resemble an early 17th century English manor house and it is a magnificent survivor of the days when North Prospect Avenue was the city's premier residential district known as the "Gold Coast."

The stately residence is not an exact copy of any known 17th century English building. Instead, the house reflects the architects' remarkable dexterity in working with the design tenets of the original Elizabethan and

Jacobean styles of architecture. The mansion is also a splendid example of what historians call ethnic architecture, which means that the design reflects the original owner's ethnic heritage and links America with the building traditions of the Old World.

Most of the other original mansions in the neighborhood were demolished over the last half-century to make way for mid- and high-rise apartment buildings. Today this grand house, now used for professional offices, is a veritable time capsule of late nineteenth century design and craftsmanship. It is an exceptional structure and only a handful of Victorian-era mansions in Milwaukee are comparable to it in terms of size and quality.

Description

The Goll House is located on a commanding site at the top of a steep bluff above Veterans' Park and Lake Michigan. The house is flanked to the north by a large, seven-story, 1950s apartment building and immediately to the south a hi-rise condominium was under construction in early 2002. The Goll house is a contributing structure in the middle of the Prospect Avenue Mansions National Register Historic district that is composed of 15 late nineteenth and early twentieth century houses fanned out over three contiguous blocks.

The 2-1/2 story, brick, side gabled, Elizabethan/Jacobean revival style Goll House is trimmed with half timbering and exquisite woodcarving in the side gables and further embellished with fine carved stonework around principal windows and the main entrance facing North Prospect Avenue. The tan pressed brick is laid in a classic Flemish style bond and the narrow mortar joints are tinted to roughly the same color.

The front elevation is composed of a central entry flanked by gabled, projecting bays. A round-arched colonnade and entablature frames the recessed front entry door that features an impressive hand-wrought ornamental iron grill over the window. Flanking the entry to the north is a projecting, semi-octagonal one-story bay window topped with a spectacular carved limestone parapet. The second story of each projecting bay is fenestrated with a bay of three

large double hung windows set in chamfered limestone mullions. The apex of each of the front gables is topped with a carved limestone finial. The steeply pitched roof is finished with the original gray slate and a magnificent period style brick chimney soars above each of the gabled end walls.

The side elevation facing south is composed of two stories of brick topped with a gabled attic story that is finished with stucco and half timbering and further embellished with some of the finest wood and stone carving in the city. The eye-catching plancher board that tops the second story windows is richly embellished with traditional strapwork carving that incorporates scrolled serpents and diamond-like raised panels called lozenges that are hallmarks of Elizabethan and Jacobean design. The plancher board rests on seven projecting, hand-carved stone, human heads that recall the designs of medieval English architecture. The spectacular carved wooden bargeboards that trim the steeply pitched gable rival the quality and richness of the original Elizabethan carvings that inspired their design.

The side elevation that faces north is similar in character to the south elevation. It is composed of a brick first story that is surmounted by an extraordinary, projecting, gabled, stucco and half-timbered bay on the second and attic stories. Eleven hand-carved stone human heads are employed as corbels beneath the bay. The gables are trimmed with massive carved wooden bargeboards. An entry door sheltered by a projecting shed-roofed porch hood is located at the rear of the elevation. Windows are randomly placed to respond to the needs of the interior.

The rear elevation facing east towards Lake Michigan is composed of a gabled wing that projects from the main block of the house. Randomly placed windows are trimmed with dressed limestone lintels and sills. The building shows remarkable pride in ownership and has been maintained in pristine condition. It has been used for professional offices since the late 1940s, and virtually no changes have been made to the publicly visible elevations since it was built.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Frederick and Eleanor Goll House is significant as one of the city's finest examples of the Jacobean/Elizabethan revival style of architecture. Embellished with some of the best hand-carved exterior wood and stonework in Milwaukee, it represents the zenith of 19th century craftsmanship and design. The mansion is a splendid example of ethnic architecture, which means that the design reflects the original owner's ethnic heritage and links America with the building traditions of the Old World. The preservation of good examples of ethnic architecture, which are relatively rare in America, is a priority in the State Historical Society's cultural resource management plan for Wisconsin.

The Goll house is historically important because its construction marked a turning point in Milwaukee when architects and their patrons began to abandon the eclectic revival styles of architecture that characterized the late nineteenth century and focused instead on the design of authentic period styles. The mansion is also significant as a masterwork of local architects Ferry and Clas who have contributed significantly to the design of the city as it stands today.

VIII. HISTORY

Architecture

The Frederick & Eleanor Goll house is an exceptional example of the Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style that was popular for the designs of large estate houses and mansions built in America between the early 1890s and about 1925. The style was based on English architecture from the late 16th and early 17th centuries that included the consecutive reigns of English monarchs Queen Elizabeth and King James I from 1558 to 1625. The Victorians of the nineteenth century idealized the era because it was strongly associated with a remarkable and adventurous period in English history that included the life of playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the first circumnavigation of the world by Sir Francis Drake (1577), and the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock (1621).³ The Elizabethan and Jacobean styles were also the first in England to exhibit the influence of the Renaissance that had spread earlier throughout most of the European continent.



Spectacular wood and stone carving embellishes the south gable of the Goll House.

The Elizabethan/Jacobean era was relatively short and its acclaimed architecture has been characterized as a transition between the Gothic era that preceded it and the mature Renaissance period that followed it in England. Many Jacobean buildings were regarded as basically variations of the earlier Elizabethan structures and for this reason the revival style tended to combine these two historic styles of architecture. The buildings typically retained the massing and plans associated with the Gothic era, but they were embellished with classical details that reflected the emergence of the Renaissance style in northern Europe. Most of the best examples of the style possess projecting bays, steeply pitched roofs and prominent Tudor style chimneys that added both visual distinction and complexity to the massing. The focal point of the interior was an impressive central staircase embellished with a wealth of carved hardwoods.

The style was revived in England during the mid-19th century for the construction of single and multiple family houses that, in turn, were very important in helping to shape design tastes in America about a half-century later in the 1890s. In America good examples of the Jacobethan/Elizabethan revival style, such as the Goll house, are relatively rare. The

Goll House is particularly significant to Milwaukee's architectural history because it is believed to be the city's first major house designed in an authentic Elizabethan/Jacobean period revival style. The design of the house also marks a more general departure from purely Victorian eclectic architectural tastes and an emerging preference for English-inspired design and other scholarly interpretations of period revival styles.

³ Rexford Newcomb, *The History of Architecture, Part III*. Champaign, Illinois: Union Book Store, 1948, p. 105-109.

The impressive massing, projecting bays, steeply pitched roofs and half-timbered gables are all medieval in character. The splendid engaged limestone colonnade that surrounds the front entry is a fine, Renaissance-style detail as is the strapwork carved parapet that tops the projecting bay flanking the front door. Additional strapwork can be seen in the remarkable carved wooden plancer boards above the second story windows on the north and south elevations. Strapwork is an example of an early Renaissance detail common in northern European countries. Historians believe that the architect Francesco Primaticcio invented strapwork at Fontainebleau Palace in France in 1533 and that this building, in turn, was highly influential on English architecture.⁴



Condover Hall (1598) is a large Elizabethan estate house in England that exhibits the projecting bays, chimneys, gables and massing that are similar to the Goll house in Milwaukee.

The exterior face brick of the Goll house is laid in a classic Flemish bond pattern that was also employed for some of the original Elizabethan/Jacobean buildings in England. The brickwork recalls the fact that during the early 17th century there were many German and Flemish craftsmen working in England who brought their building traditions with them from the European continent. Each course of a Flemish bond wall is composed of alternating header and stretcher brick.

In sum, the Goll house is a one-of-a kind, irreplaceable structure that has been an architectural focal point of its neighborhood for more than a century. It is a veritable textbook of architecture and its scholarly design links America with the culture and building traditions of the Old World. It is also a remarkable reminder of the fact that good design is, indeed, timeless and the enduring value of this building to the community emphasizes the need for its continued preservation.



Architects Ferry and Clas designed the Goll and Frank building (1895) at 301 North Water Street. It is one of pivotal buildings in the Third Ward Historic District.

Frederick T. Goll

A century ago Milwaukee was a thriving center of wholesale trade and Frederick T. Goll (1854-1931) was one of the city's most successful entrepreneurs in the business. His wholesale dry goods firm, Goll and Frank, was founded in 1852 by his German-immigrant father, Julius, and a partner, August Frank. During its peak years, the business was located in a huge, 7-story Neoclassical style structure built for firm in 1895

⁴ R. Furneaux Jordan. *A Concise History of Western Architecture*. London: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich. 1980, p. 228.

according to designs by architects Ferry and Clas. The impressive building still stands at 301 North Water Street in the city's Third Ward Historic District and it reflects the importance and success of the business at the end of the 19th century.

Julius Goll (1823-1896) was an avid reader and particularly fond of English, French and German literature.⁵ He passed his love for books on to his son, Frederick, who amassed one of the most extensive private libraries in the city. Frederick's mother, Margaret (1825-1901), was born in England and came to Milwaukee as an adult with her family.⁶ Her heritage and influence is believed to have motivated Frederick to select a traditional English style for his mansion. "His sympathies were with the English," according to the reminiscences of one of his daughters.⁷ He was also a member of the Episcopal Church, which is affiliated with the Church of England.

Frederick Goll started his career in his father's firm at the age of 15 in 1869. Beginning as a stock clerk, he was subsequently promoted to salesman and textile buyer before succeeding his father as company president in 1895. The senior Goll had done a remarkable job of building the company into a wholesaling giant and moving it from a small rented space at 767 North Water Street to increasingly larger buildings.

When Frederick Goll assumed control of the firm he immediately implemented plans to tear down the company headquarters at 301 North Water Street that had been built in 1882 and replace it with a much larger structure that still stands there today. He selected the prestigious firm of Ferry and Clas to design a building that would "long stand as a fitting monument to the name of Goll & Frank."⁸ Pleased with the work that the architectural firm had done on the building, he hired them again a few years later to design his imposing mansion on the city's most prestigious residential thoroughfare at 1550 North Prospect Avenue. Prior to moving into the house in 1897 he, his wife Eleanor, and their five children lived in an older neighborhood of fine homes near the corner of Jackson and State Streets.

Mr. Goll was also a financial expert and in 1896 he became a director of the First National Bank of Milwaukee. The firm of Goll & Frank was eventually reorganized in 1929 as Fred T. Goll & Sons with sons Harry and Julius joining their father as partners. Mr. Goll was active in new firm, mostly as an advisor, until his death in 1931. The firm was reorganized again in 1938 as J. H. Goll Company and they specialized in wholesaling household and intuitional linens.

After Mr. Goll died his widow continued to live in the Prospect Avenue mansion until 1935. The house was vacant in 1936, according to city directories, just before it was changed to a 16-unit rooming house. In 1950 the stately house was converted into professional offices for William L. Momsen and Wesley T. Tuttle who were agents for the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. Still used for offices today, the house demonstrates that new uses can be found for fine, old buildings.

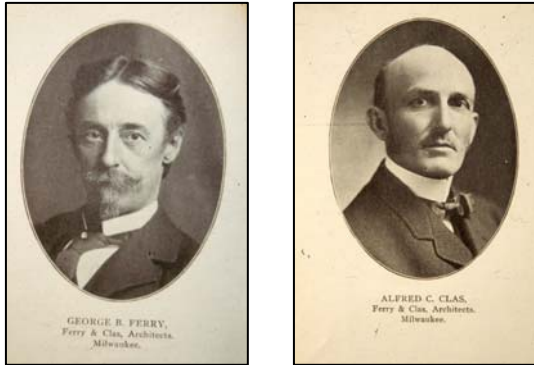
⁵ Souvenir of the semi-centennial anniversary of the Goll & Frank Co., 1902.

⁶ *Wisconsin. Stability, Progress, Beauty, Vol. III.* Chicago: TheLewis Publishing Company, 1946, p.140.

⁷ H. Russell Zimmermann, *Magnificent Milwaukee. Architectural Treasures 1850-1920.* Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1987, p.147.

⁸ Souvenir of the semi-centennial anniversary of the Goll & Frank Co., 1902, "Our New Building" section.

Architects



George Bowman Ferry (L) and his partner
Alfred Charles Clas

Ferry and Clas worked together during a remarkable period of expansion and development in Milwaukee and they have contributed immensely to the architectural character of the city as it stands today. Between 1890 and 1912 the partner's design work included some of the city's finest mansions as well as churches, schools and commercial buildings.

Today, many of their extant buildings are listed on the local and national registers. One of their best-known structures is the Frederick Pabst Mansion (1894) at 2000 W. Wisconsin Avenue, which is regarded by many historians as the finest Flemish

Renaissance Revival style house in the country. Other outstanding examples of their design work includes the First Unitarian Church (1892) at 1009 E. Ogden Avenue; the Steinmeyer commercial building (1893) at 1050 N. 3rd Street; The Milwaukee Public 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. George Ferry is also credited with designing the remarkable tower for St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Cathedral in 1892.⁹

Mr. Ferry (1851-1918), who was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1871 and 1872. He then began an architectural career in his hometown but moved to Milwaukee with his wife in 1880 to establish his own practice. An early example of his independent work is Wisconsin Women's Club (1887) at 813 East Kilbourn Avenue. In 1890 he began a partnership with Alfred Clas that lasted until 1912 and together the two were responsible for some of the city's most important architectural commissions of that era.¹⁰

Mr. Clas (1859-1942) was a Wisconsin native born in Sauk City to German immigrant parents. After graduating from high school he worked briefly as a messenger in the State Senate and then entered an architectural apprenticeship. He moved to Stockton, California in 1879 where he worked in architects' offices for about two years before returning to Wisconsin and settling in Milwaukee. Between 1880 and 1886 he worked with prominent architect James Douglas first as a draftsman and later, between 1885 and 1886 as a partner.¹¹ Mr. Clas left the firm in 1887 to set up his own independent practice and subsequently formed his successful partnership with George Ferry in 1890.

After the Ferry and Clas partnership dissolved in 1912 the two men continued independent architectural practices. An example of Mr. Ferry's design work from this period is the James McIntosh double residence, a charming English cottage at 2704 E. Hartford Avenue on the city's upper east side. Before he passed away in 1918 Mr. Ferry helped to organize

⁹ Milwaukee building permit research.

¹⁰ *Evening Wisconsin*, January 29, 1918, p. 1; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Home edition, January 29, 1918, p. 5; *Milwaukee Journal*, market edition, January 29, 1918, p. 1, all obituaries for George B. Ferry.

¹¹ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. New York: James T. White and Co., 1948, p. 100.

Wisconsin's first architectural association and was a member of the original committee that framed the by-laws and constitution of the American Institute of Architects.

In 1912 Alfred Clas formed a new partnership, Clas and Clas, with his son Angelo. In 1921 he reorganized the partnership as Clas, Shepherd and Clas by adding another son, Rubens, and John S. Shepherd to the firm. During the Great Depression in 1931 Mr. Shepherd left the firm and it became Clas and Clas once again. Mr. Clas stayed active in the business until 1936 and then retired to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Returning to Milwaukee after his wife died in 1939, Mr. Clas passed away in 1942 at the Masonic Home in Dousman where he was under care for injuries that resulted from a fall on the ice.¹²

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Frederick T. Goll House be considered for designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-4, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

e-4 Its portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style.

Rationale: Criterion **e-4** is applied because the design of the house reflects the zenith of residential architecture in Milwaukee at the end of the nineteenth century.

e-5 Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

Rationale: Criterion **e-5** is applied because the house is one of the city's finest and earliest examples of Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style architecture. It is also a fine example of ethnic architecture, which means that it was designed to reflect the ethnic heritage of its original owner. The preservation of good examples of ethnic architecture, which are relatively rare in America, is a priority in the State Historical Society's cultural resource management plan for Wisconsin.

e-6 Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, interior designer, craftsman, or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or the United States.

Rationale: Criterion **e-6** is applied because the designers of the house, Ferry and Clas were some of the city's best architects during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their work has contributed significantly to the architectural character of the city as it stands today.

¹² Milwaukee Journal, Local News, P. 1 col., Wednesday, July 8, 1942.

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.

Rationale: Criterion **e-9** is applied because the house is one of the grand structures associated with the Prospect Avenue Residential district which was called the “Gold Coast” because of its impressive collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century mansions that were occupied by many of the city’s most prominent families.

REFERENCES

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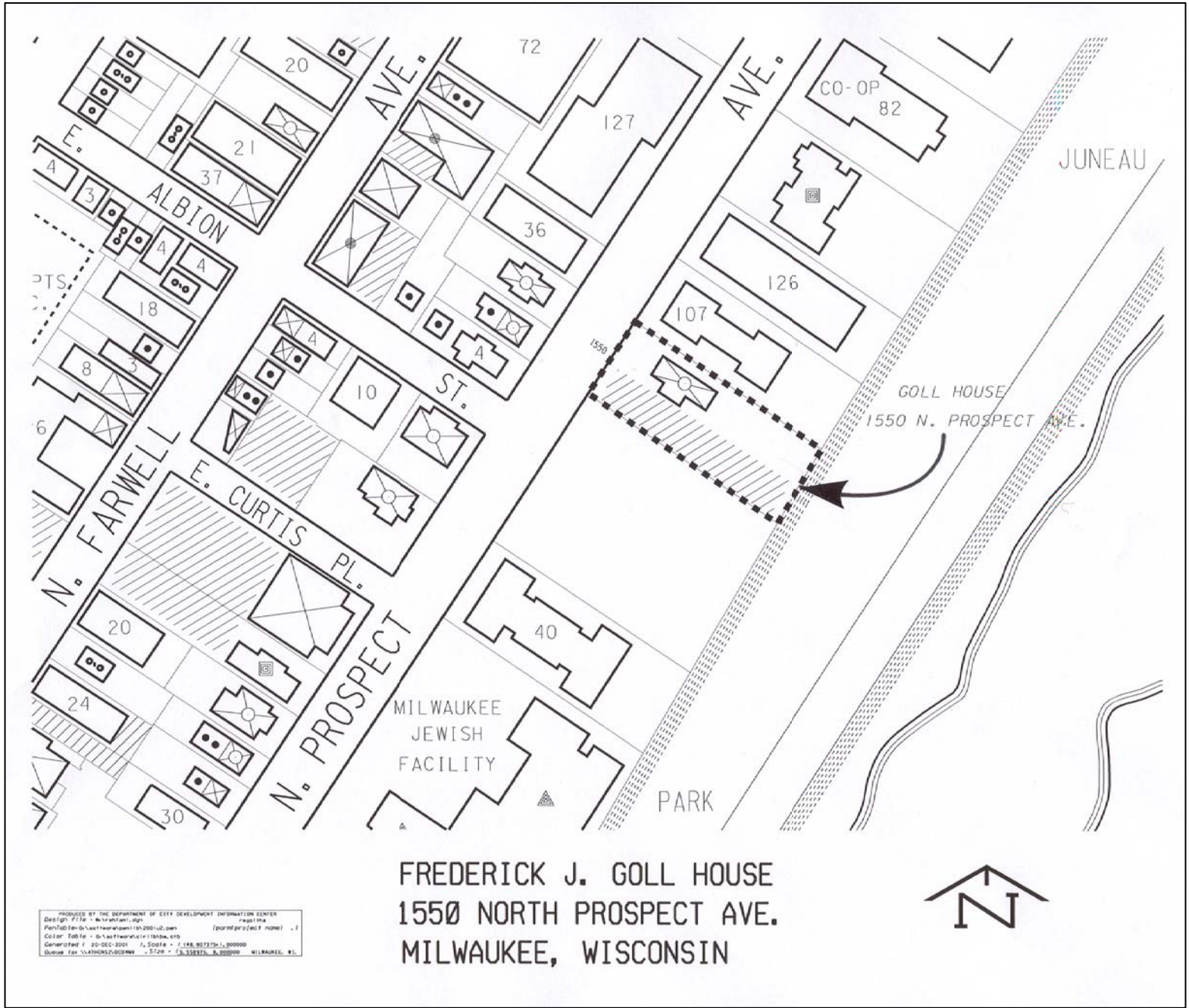
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X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

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 building height, roofline or pitch.

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. 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 joints.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary 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 building. 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 or terra cotta.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new materials that duplicate the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. The carved wooden bargeboards and heads on the north and south sides of the building are essential features and should be retained.
- 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 modern materials that are incompatible with the historic character of the building. The installation of new vinyl trim or siding is not allowed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of window panes or sash.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or doors. Avoid filling-in or covering up openings with incompatible materials such as concrete or glass block. Avoid the installation of modern window units with glazing configurations that are incompatible with the style of the building (e.g., installing Colonial style windows in place of original double hung windows). The original wooden windows in the house are important features and should not be removed except for restoration.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

Existing trim or ornamentation should not be changed 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

Additions are permitted with the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the building. The commission will review the compatibility of the addition with the historic house and may consider the following details: Window size and placement, scale, design, materials, roof configuration, height and the degree to which the addition impacts the principal elevation(s) of the house.

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 architectural character of the building. The existing metal box sign on the front lawn does not need to be removed, but new translucent plastic signboards that are illuminated from behind and mounted in metal box are discouraged and usually not approved by the commission.

G. Site features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures should respect and enhance the historic architectural character of the building.

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 house.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the house. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the house from the street as a free-standing 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 proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the house.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the house as a distinct, freestanding structure. The profile of roof and building elements that project and recede from the main historic building should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in proximity to it.

4. Materials

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

I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there are 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.