

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

I. NAME

Historic: George A. Sievers House

Common Name: Edward A. and Dorinne T. Green House

II. LOCATION

3173 and 3179-3181 S. 31st Street

Legal Description - Tax Key No.: 533-0712-100 and 533-0713-100

South Parkway Subd in NE ¼ SEC 13-6-21 Block 1
N 35' LOT 14 & S 15' Lot 13 and Lot 15 and S 5' LOT 14

III. CLASSIFICATION

Site

IV. OWNERS

Green Rev Living TR D6-2-89
Edward A. Green & Dorinne T Green
Initial Trustees
3173 S. 31st Street
Milwaukee, WI 53215

ALDERMAN

Ald. Robert G. Donovan 8th Aldermanic District

NOMINATOR

Edward Anthony Green

V. YEAR BUILT

1941 (Permit No. 7049 dated April 14, 1941)

ARCHITECT:

Carl Liebert (Permit No. 7049 dated April 14, 1941; Plans dated
December 18-26, 1940)

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The George A. Sievers House is located at the northwest corner of S. 31st Street and W. Euclid Avenue. The property consists of two lots (Lots 14 and 15) as well as the south 15 feet of Lot 13. The total dimension of the property is 95 feet wide by 120 feet long. The Sievers House is located on lot 14, set back from the street over 20 feet, and from the north lot line over 4 feet. Behind the house and at the northwest corner of the lot is a small structure once used as an office by the original owner. There is a rear yard. The south end of the property, Lot 15, is

planted with trees and has a naturalistic appearance. The neighborhood is characterized by tree-lined streets with modest sized single family houses set on 40-foot wide lots. Some of the houses were built before World War II but a majority was constructed in the late 1940s with the peak building occurring in 1950. Houses vary in style from Cape Cod to late Tudor to Colonials. The large complex of Aurora St. Luke's dominates the vicinity north of Oklahoma Avenue and west of 27th Street and the former Southgate Shopping Center and other retail businesses dominate S. 27th Street south of Oklahoma Avenue.

The George A. Sievers House appears from the street as a rectangular structure, built into a hill that slopes from the back to the front of the property. It has a side gabled shingle roof with concrete block lower level and a clapboard-clad upper story. A short brick chimney extends from the apex of the roof and is painted white. Since it is built into a hill, a portion of the lower level is exposed above grade. A prominent feature of the front elevation is the projecting garage at the north end of the main façade. It has a shed roof clad in asphalt shingles. The shed roof extends from the sill of the windows on the upper level. The garage has a wooden overhead garage door with six square lights over eighteen recessed panels. The garage, as well as the remainder of the lower level, is constructed of concrete block and has a parged surface that is painted white. The garage space extends back into the lower level of the house. To the left of the garage is a recessed porch, tucked under the upper level of the house, supported by three piers. This play of projecting garage and recessed porch adds interest to the façade. The main entrance to the house is located in this porch. The entry door is protected by a wooden storm door with six lights. The porch also shelters a pedestrian entrance into the garage, located on the garage's south wall. It is protected by a wooden storm door with three lights over a recessed panel. Fenestration on the main façade consists of a four-over-four light window on the lower level located to the left of the main entrance, a pair of windows with four-over-four sash at the far south end of the upper level and a three-part window at the far north end of the elevation above the shed roof of the garage. The center window of this grouping is broad and features six horizontal panes. It is divided from the smaller windows that flank it by heavy mullions. Each of the smaller windows has three horizontal panes.

The south elevation lower level is mostly at grade but disappears into the hill at its west end. It features a louvered vent in the apex of the gable and a series of windows. Two broad windows with four-over-four sash are located at the lower level and illuminate the recreation room within. On the upper level is a bank of three windows with four-over-four sash that are located at the east end of the elevation. Along with the two windows of the front façade, this bank of windows wraps around the southeast corner of the house and illuminates the dining space and part of the living room within. A longer window, with four-over-six-sash is located at the far west end of the elevation and illuminates the living room within.

The north elevation features a louvered vent in the apex of the gable, three windows and a recessed porch. The windows match the four-over-four pattern as on the rest of the house. The recessed porch allows egress from the kitchen. Due to the topography, the lower level here appears as more of a traditional basement /foundation and rises only a few feet above grade. There are small basement-sized windows located at the foundation. The vent for the furnace as well as the air conditioning compressor are located at this utilitarian elevation.

The west elevation features a projecting, shingle-clad gable roofed wing on the north end that houses the master bedroom. It has windows that match the rest on the house and they grouped at the corners. The south end of this façade features an egress door to the right of the bedroom wing and tall four-over-six windows that illuminate the living room within. The door accesses a terrace that is highlighted by a sculpture of a horse.

There is a grassy lawn near the rear terrace and to rear of the house. A flight of stone/concrete steps is located to the right or north of the garage and allows access to the kitchen and bedroom doors as well as the green space along the north lot line. At the northwest corner of

the lot sits a small, rectangular, single story, gable roofed, clapboard structure that once served as the study for the original owner. The building is oriented east-west and has a grouping of three windows facing east and two windows facing south that together wrap the southeast corner of the building. The entrance is located on the south elevation. To the left of the entrance is another window. The windows have one-over-one sash. The building sits on a 16-inch concrete base.

The remainder of the property features trees and shrubs and is naturalistic in appearance.

Changes to the house appear to be very minimal. The current owners retain blueprints for the house and much appears today just as it did on the plans. Some variation occurs in the design of the garage door and the windows and the exterior sheathing and were likely made during construction. The plans describe the exterior sheathing as "Harbord Siding," a Masonite product, with an 11 ½ inch exposure. The exposure of the clapboards as built is narrower. It is not known if Harbord Siding was used or whether traditional cedar or pine clapboards were substituted at the time of construction. Today's garage has a row of windows at the top and more panels below than what was drawn in the plans. Likewise, the four-over-four sash and four-over-six sash seen today give a slightly more static look to the fenestration in contrast to the horizontal, ladder-like configuration of panes evident in the plans. The windows above the garage roof were also changed out from the one-over-one sash shown in the plans. The Green's indicated that they have not made alterations to the building. They have re-roofed, using the same black-colored shingles as the originals and kept the paint color similar to what was on the house when they bought it. They had new storms custom made to follow the muntin patterns of the windows. They have not changed much of the landscaping but added a terrace on the north side off the kitchen.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The George A. Sievers House is significant as an early example in Milwaukee of a modern dwelling of modest means that turned away from the revival styles so popular in the 1920s and looked forward to the clean lined houses of the post-World War II era. The house is devoid of any applied architectural detail, and is almost vernacular in appearance. The clean horizontal lines of the clapboards, the grouping of the windows at the corners, the simple sash patterns and prominence given to the front garage all speak to the new aesthetic in house design. It was a clear departure from most of its contemporaries in the neighborhood and quite different from the Streamline Moderne or the International Style adopted by the larger, high style, and more expensive houses built in scattered places in the city. The Sievers House concentrates on function and gives the sense that it was designed from the interior out with less concern given to traditional curb appeal. Architect Carl Liebert took advantage of a challenging site with sloping hill and produced a house whose lower level was able to provide not only parking and utility space but a recreation room as well, lit by three prominent windows. The main living spaces on the upper level reflect the change in floor plans that were becoming popular at the time. Only the dining area was still at the front of the house. The old parlor/living room was now moved back to rear of the dwelling where windows allowed private views of the garden and access to a private terrace. Likewise, the kitchen was moved from the rear of the building to the front of the house facing the street. Bedrooms were located behind the kitchen for more privacy away from the street.

VIII. HISTORY

The George A. Sievers House is located within the South Parkway Subdivision, bordered by S. 27th Street on the east, Oklahoma Avenue on the north, and W. Euclid Avenue on the south (three lots south of Euclid) with the west boundary located in mid-block between S. 31st Street and S. 32nd Street. The subdivision plat was recorded on March 3, 1927 by owner Home Realty Company. Home Realty was comprised of Ottmar A. Becker, president, Theodore A. Trapp, secretary, and the Wadhams Oil Company. Wadhams executives at the time included J. H. Marschutz, vice president, and Louis McNally, secretary. Lots in the subdivision were generally 40 feet wide by 120 feet deep

with some exception in the lots south of Euclid Avenue which were larger and more irregular in size. Blocks were bisected by rear alleys with the exception of the block bounded by S. 31st Street, S. 32nd Street, W. Oklahoma Avenue and W. Euclid Avenue. The subdivision was centered on the Kinnickinnic River Parkway, a boulevard thoroughfare that was located along S. 30th Street and followed the southeast branch of the Kinnickinnic River. This parkway extended north of Oklahoma Avenue where it eventually branched east and west between W. Manitoba and W. Dakota Streets. South of South Parkway Subdivision, the Kinnickinnic River flows south and is located behind the former Southgate Shopping Center.

Restrictive covenants allowed for residential buildings only with the exception of S. 27th Street and Oklahoma Avenue. Today, S. 27th Street has evolved as a major transportation route and commercial district. Oklahoma Avenue remains mostly residential with the exception of the former Christian Science Church in the 3000 block. Houses could not cost less than \$4,000, there could be no "bungalow garages", that is, garage size temporary residences set at the rear of the lots, the houses had to be placed no less than 20 feet from the lot line and no tin roofs were allowed on sheds. No sand or gravel could be removed from lots. Now illegal, no property could be conveyed to or occupied by a "colored person."

The South Parkway Subdivision got off to a slow development. The first house, a stucco structure, was built in 1929 at 3146 S. 28th Street. The Great Depression slowed most housing construction until the late 1930s. The second house was built in 1932 at 3136 S. 29th Street and a third started in 1935 at 3140 S. 30th Street. Two more houses followed on 1936, six in 1937, seven in 1938, three in 1940. Surprisingly, house building continued through World War II albeit at a slow pace. There were six houses built in 1941, eight houses built in 1942, two houses built in 1943, four in 1944 and four in 1945. The peak period of development occurred in the years immediately following World War II. The number of houses included seven in 1946, seven in 1947, eleven in 1948, and fourteen in 1949. The peak year of development in the subdivision occurred in 1950 when twenty-eight houses were constructed. With many of the lots full, construction slowed thereafter. Six houses were built in 1951, two in 1952, one in 1953, six in 1954, one each year in 1955, 1956 and 1957. There were two houses built in 1959, and the last three built one each year in 1963, 1964 and 1977.

Housing styles consist of bungalows, Cape Cods, Colonials and post war derivations of the old Tudor cottages as well as some vernacular front gabled houses. There were also a few duplexes built although most are single family houses. Virtually all houses were contractor designed and built. Some notable names as the Schroeder Bros. built nine dwellings. Fred Mikkelson built seventeen. The few architect designed houses included the Medina House at 3162 S. 28th Street designed by Henry L. Kuehnel (1936); the Bartz House at 3143 S. 29th Street designed by Stanley Rypel (1949); the Safiejko House at 3147 S. 29th Street designed by Stanley Rypel (1958); the Boone House at 3168 S. 30th Street designed by George Zigel & Brother (1938); the Bierman House at 3125-27 S. 31st Street designed by R. H. Bierman (1936); and the George A. Sievers House at 3173 S. 31st Street designed by Carl Liebert (1941). There are even two examples of Harnischfeger pre-fab houses at 3200 S. 31st Street (1947) and 3163 S. 30th Street (1947). Today, Aurora St. Luke's hospital is making inroads south of Oklahoma Avenue. It owns the frontage along the south side of Oklahoma Avenue between S. 28th and S. 29th Streets and four properties along Oklahoma Avenue between S. 29th Street and S. 30th Street as well as seventeen other houses in the subdivision.

GEORGE A. SIEVERS

The lots at 3173 S. 31st Street and 3179-3181 S. 31st Street have turned over only a few times since the South Parkway Subdivision was created. Lots 8 through 15 were deeded from the developer to Mark A. Klein on January 23, 1933. (Deeds 1374:182) Kline was listed in the city directories as 1st assistant City Attorney and lived at 939 N. 31st Street with his wife Judith. In a judgment by default, the lots were quit claimed to the City of Milwaukee on July 14, 1939. (Deeds 1571:445, 1571:452) The City subsequently sold Lot 14 to George A. Sievers on December 18, 1940 for \$800. (Deeds

1707:534) Plans for the new house that Sievers and his wife were proposing to build are dated from December 18th through the 22nd, 1940, each sheet dated as the drawings were completed. We do not know whether there was a personal relationship between Sievers and architect Carl Liebert or whether he was referred by a friend or had seen another house that he liked designed by the architect. Construction on the Sievers' house began next spring. It was financed by a mortgage for \$6500 from A.L. Grootemaat & Sons on March 24, 1941. (Mortgages 1930:536) Sievers subsequently took out a permit to construct the house that is the subject of this nomination on April 14, 1941. (3173 S. 31st Street Permit number 7049)

The house was featured in the Milwaukee Journal in 1941. The article included a rendering and was titled "Uniquely Planned House." To quote from the article:

Carl Liebert, architect, has designed an unusual residence (shown above), at 3173 S. 31st st., for George A. Sievers. The home, of frame and cement block construction, is to be built on a 40 foot lot, and the natural slope of the lot is to be retained. The garage and entrance to the house are on the street (basement) level, directly accessible to the recreation room and laundry. An electric communication system connects the basement level entry and the kitchen, which is on the first floor. A folding door over counter space in the kitchen opens to create a snack bar in the living room. There is a private outdoor terrace off the living room at the top of the slope at the rear of the house. The living room has a fireplace nook with a built-in seat. (Milwaukee Journal, May 1941)

The Sievers house is characteristic of the modestly scaled dwellings that were going up in the South Parkway Subdivision. By this time there had been 21 houses built in the subdivision. Six houses were to be built in 1941. The Sievers' clapboard and concrete block house was rectangular in form with a side gabled roof, a projecting garage of concrete block at the front and a bedroom wing extending off the house at the rear. As described above, the house was built into a hill, a topographical feature noticeable on the block. The hill tapers away at the corner of Euclid Street. One other house north of the Sievers House, (3143 S. 31st Street, built 1940) likewise has a garage built into the hill but does not otherwise have an exposed lower living level. While attached garages at the front of the house had become increasingly common in the 1920s as more and more owners came to have automobiles, the more utilitarian approach shown in the Sievers House was a foreshadowing of the type of facade that came to dominate the architectural scene after World War II where the garage became a focal point at the front of the house. In this instance, topography played an important role in the design of the house as well since the hilly terrain did not allow for a convenient side drive and rear garage. The total lack of historic features or applied architectural detail makes this house very forward looking in the neighborhood yet it retains the gabled roof and clapboard siding that ground the house in traditional form.

There are some discrepancies in the records about the second structure located on the property. This building is located at the northwest corner of the lot, and is rectangular in form with a gabled roof. A building inspector followed up on a complaint from the alderman's office on November 25, 1942 that a business was being conducted in a residential area. The inspector found a small 12-foot by 20-foot building to the rear of the residence. His notes say "Mr. Sievers claims he is a professor at U of W and uses this to prepare lessons. - He said he operates - "The Industrial Engineering Institute at 4528 W. Greenfield Ave. where 10 people work. This has no connection with his residence. Also said Lieut[ant] of Detectives Nowakowski lives next door, if any violation was here he would not tolerate it being a law enforcement officer." The following year, however, permit records dated August 19, 1943 show that a small shed and chicken coop, 10-foot by 20-foot, was being constructed at the northwest corner of the lot on 15 feet of land purchased from the adjacent Lot 13 to the north on August 1, 1943. The frame building was constructed on a concrete slab and the estimated cost was \$150. The original 8-inch slab was found deficient by the building inspector and additional concrete was poured. The slab ended up at 16 inches. (Interview with Edward Green by Carlen Hatala December 10, 2008) The inspector's notes show that the foundation was being excavated on September 3rd, the framing and sheathing were going on by September 23rd and that the building was completed October 20th. It is unclear what happened to

the original office, unless it was relocated to the coop site. Perhaps the inspector wrote in the wrong year when making his inspection about a business being run out of the property. Edward Green, the current owner, confirms that Mr. Sievers had used the existing structure for his office and that there was a second room with a workbench in it.

George Sievers eventually bought the corner lot, Lot 15, on October 28, 1947 for the sum of \$900. He took out a mortgage for \$8967.38 to finance this transaction. The mortgage was satisfied on January 28, 1955. (Mortgages 2494:67; 2492:322; 3483:356) It is not clear whether or not Sievers ever intended to build on the corner lot or just preserve the green space as a side yard for his property. The fact that the lot remained in its natural state probably points to the fact that he wanted to preserve the open space. Any construction on this corner lot would have negatively impacted the light coming into his lower level windows and could possibly have caused structural or drainage problems for the house.

George Sievers and his wife Florence lived in the house most of their life. They had one son, John.

Census records from 1930 indicate that George August Sievers (October 2, 1903 – June 15, 1983) immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1924 and that he worked as an electrician. We do not know where Sievers lived in those first few years or why he chose Milwaukee. There were at least six households of Sievers in the city directory in 1924 and perhaps George had come because of family connections. George and his wife Florence were first listed in the city directory in 1927; George did not have an occupation listed and Florence worked as a saleslady at Gimbel Brothers. The Sievers lived in at least five different addresses before purchasing the property and building their house on S. 31st Street. Their former residences included 521 Frederick Avenue (today's 2497 N. Frederick Avenue) (1927-1928), 1430 Bremen (today's 3324 N. Bremen Street) (1929-1931), 929 E. Townsend Street (1932-1933), 1504 S. 55th St. (1935-1937), 1526 S. 55th St. (1938-1940).

The exact nature of George's work is unclear since he is listed as everything from an electrician to a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin. The business he started specialized in "industrial psychology." Oral history indicates that Sievers told neighbors that he was a graduate of Heidelberg University. The city directories list him as follows:

Electrician (1929-1930)
Electrical Engineer at Badger Carton (1931-1932)
Machinist American Lace Paper Company (1933)
No Listing (1934-1935)
Foremen (1936)
Engineer Falk Corp. (1938)
Industrial Engineer (1939)
Efficiency Man (1940)
Industrial Engineer at Line Material Company (1941-1942)
No Occupation (1944-45)
Engineer Galland-Henning (1947)
Professor (1949)
Owner/President Industrial Engineering Institute (1950-1967)
Psychologist (1958-1968)

Sievers apparently began his own business while working for various manufacturers in the 1940s. The Industrial Engineering Institute was in existence as early as 1942 per the inspector's notes when he was checking on Sievers running a business out of his house. Sievers supposedly had ten employees at that time. Its early location is not known. By 1950 Industrial Engineering Institute was located at 4528 W. Greenfield Avenue and the city directory listed the business as "industrial psychologists." George remained president of this business through his lifetime. One associate, "Perlewitz," was listed with the business in 1953-54 but he was not listed elsewhere in the directories. Starting around 1957 the business had two locations and associates included Dean Nichol (CPA, Treasurer) and Harry R. Habeck (Attorney, Treasurer). They were listed as industrial

psychologists and executive training specialists as well as professional engineers and had suite 775 in the Bockl Building at 2040 W. Wisconsin Avenue. The engineering division stayed on Greenfield Avenue with Victor G. Morgan as director. Sievers was also listed as having a PhD in 1960. Industrial Engineering Institute was last listed in the city directory 1967. George spun off another business, the Bureau for Professional Employment, Ltd., in 1963 and remained its president through 1972. His wife Florence served as the Bureau's vice president from 1963 through 1972.

It also appears that Sievers did some teaching. Although he told the building inspector that he was teaching at the University of Wisconsin in 1942, this does not show up in the city directories and the University records do not have record of him at that date. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives records indicate that Sievers was a part-time faculty at the UW Extension office at 600 W. Kilbourn Avenue in 1956-1957. That campus was generally used for continuing education. Additional research will need to be conducted to determine the type of courses Sievers taught and the full extent of his academic connections. (Conversation between archive staff and Barbara Hughes)

Sievers' son John W. is listed at the S. 31st Street property from 1949 through 1954. He had been born in 1928. John Sievers served in the army in the Korean War, graduated from Michigan State University in 1957 and was vice-president of his father's business, Industrial Engineering Institute. He was a member of the Milwaukee Athletic Club, the West Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce and the Henry L. Palmer Lodge of the Masons. He attended Christ Evangelical Church. He died on May 28, 1958 at St. Michael's Hospital of a liver ailment. He was survived by his parents, his wife Nancy (Hodgson) and son George R. He was buried in Wisconsin Memorial Park. (Milwaukee Journal Thursday May 29, 1958 page 2; Milwaukee Sentinel Death Notice May 29, 1958 Part 2 Page 9); Milwaukee Sentinel May 29, 1958 Obituary)

We do not know much about the Sievers social lives. Neighborhood history indicates that Mr. Sievers supported the Nazis' activities during World War II and donned a Nazi uniform in private. His sympathies did not endear him to his neighbors. George and Florence Sievers last lived in the S. 31st Street house in 1957. City directories show them at 2340 S. Green Links Drive in 1958, in West Allis (no address) from 1959 to 1965 and then in Mequon from 1966 until their deaths. Florence Sievers (nee Thoeke) died at Alexian Village on December 29, 1965 at the age of 62. (Milwaukee Journal December 21, 1966 Death Notices) George followed her on June 15, 1983 at the age of 79. (Milwaukee Journal June 17, 1983 Death Notices)

Daughter-in-law Nancy Sievers is shown living in the S. 31st Street house through 1958. The house was subsequently vacant. George and Florence Sievers sold the house to Edward and Dorinne Green on October 15, 1959 and then later sold the corner lot to them on October 5, 1960. (Deeds 3977:550, 4078:585)

EDWARD GREEN

Edward Green worked at the Milwaukee Public Museum at the time he and his wife purchased the house. They had lived nearby at 47th Street and Oklahoma Avenue and were thinking of building a house in the Jackson Park area but liked this house immediately when shown the building. Edward Green has long been involved in the arts and visitors to the Public Museum can view his streets of Old Milwaukee and the ethnic village.

Mr. Green's extensive career was highlighted in the Great Lakes Bulletin July 21, 1995:

Edward A. Green is honored

Edward A. Green, director of the Mitchell Gallery of Flight at Mitchell International airport, will be the guest of honor at the ceremony, and the featured speaker at the post-review luncheon at the Port O'Call.

Green is a native Milwaukeean who began an architectural apprenticeship in the office of Martin Finch White in 1940. World War II intervened, and he enlisted in the United States Coast Guard, serving mainly on convoy duty in the North Atlantic, first aboard a frigate, the *USS Machias* - coincidentally built in his hometown – and later aboard the *USS Gen. William H. Gordon*, a troop transport vessel. He also served in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater.

Green graduated from the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison with honors: he earned a bachelor's degree [fine arts major], and two master's degree, [sic] and was elected Phi Kappa Phi. Joining the Milwaukee Public Museum in 1951, he became its art director, designing all its architectural comparative house types as well as dozens of other exhibits. [He retired in 1984.] He taught watercolor painting and life drawing for many years at UW-Milwaukee, Cardinal Stritch College and Whitnall Park. Currently he is a lecturer in the UWM Outreach Program.

He has led university art tours to Europe and Great Britain. Green was a Milwaukee City art commissioner and served on the Landmarks Commission. He has been a consultant to museums from Providence, R.I. to Turock, Calif. and Canada. He has been recognized by the Art Commission for lifetime service to the arts, one of 85 outstanding Milwaukeeans and is listed in *Who's Who in America* 1994. He has won awards in all the Wisconsin major art exhibitions.

Green married artist-educator Dorinne Traulsen in 1953, and they have two children. In his spare time, he collects toy soldiers and trains, and enjoys playing softball. Green is, in addition to his current duties with the Mitchell Gallery of Flight, principal of Green Design group, a position he has held since 1984. He has also been involved in the planning of a naval museum at Great Lakes.

IX. ARCHITECT

Carl Liebert (November 18, 1903-May 31, 1992) was one of five children born to noted local architect Eugene Liebert and his wife Adele Logemann. One passed away in infancy. Carl's siblings included Walter F. (1894- 19??), Arthur E. (1893-19??), and Eugene G. (1897-19??). To quote from Gregory's History of Milwaukee,

[Carl] attended the public schools and began work as an apprentice under his father in 1923. In September, 1924, he entered the University of Michigan as a student of architecture and was graduated in 1929 [attended 1924-1928], after which he returned to Milwaukee and entered the firm of E. R. Liebert [which also included his brother Walter]. He is a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon and Tau sigma Delta [honorary architectural fraternity] fraternities. In 1926 he married Kate Pier Simonds, [his high school sweetheart] granddaughter of Kate Pier, and they have one child, Carl, Jr., now three years of age. (Gregory, Vol. 4, pp. 709-710)

In an interview with Carl Liebert by Carlen Hatala on July 12, 1988, Carl indicated that he had worked during the summer months as a draftsman for the school board under architect Guy Wiley and that Collegiate Gothic was popular then. A branch of the architectural firm was established in Michigan during Carl's tenure at Michigan State. The architectural office closed during the Great Depression and city directories show him working out of his home at 422 E. Day Street in Whitefish Bay. Carl reopened his practice in Milwaukee in 1936 at 720 N. Jefferson Street, Room 406 in 1936 and shared the premises with his father Eugene R. They maintained these offices through about 1940.

Beginning in 1936, Carl Liebert moved his residence back to Milwaukee. He and his wife subsequently lived at a number of addresses: 1007 N. Cass Street (1936), 826 N. Cass Street Apt.

14 (1937), 1830 E. Kane Place # 7 (1938-1941) and then returned to Whitefish Bay at 5461 N. Danbury Road (1942-1959).

Carl worked for Building Engineering Service in 1942 and then opened offices at 1101 N. Van Buren Street. In an interview with Carl Liebert's son Carl J. Liebert by Barbara Hughes on November 21, 2008, Liebert is said to have been one of only two architects to practice architecture during World War II, his having been too young to serve in World War I and too old in World II. Liebert's son also indicated that his father had some industrial projects during the war. The family did not keep records of his architectural commissions.

Carl Liebert moved to Neenah, Wisconsin in 1959. After his wife died in 1970 he relocated to Rhinelander, Wisconsin where he remained active until retiring in 1989. He later died on May 31, 1992. Carl Liebert, Jr. and daughter-in-law Marilyn continue to live in Rhinelander. His grandson is now a practicing architect in Rhinelander, continuing the family tradition.

As stated above, no inventory was taken of Carl Liebert's projects and the family has no records of his father's works. We know of only a handful of his commissions. Statewide surveys, funded through the State Historic Preservation Office in Madison, have failed to turn up any projects. The Wisconsin Architectural Archive has only one documented commission in its collection. That project is Christ Church at 5655 N. Lake Drive in Whitefish Bay. Carl Jr. thought the first house his father designed was located on Bay Ridge in Whitefish Bay in the 1930s. He recalled that special approval had to be given since the garage was at the front of the house. Carl Sr. indicated in his 1988 interview that he had designed a lot of banks. Carl Liebert's obituary indicated that his Rhinelander commissions included the M & I Merchants addition and drive-in, the O'Melia law offices, Frasier's Plumbing and Heating, and the Jelinek Dentistry building. The obituary also indicated that his uncle Hans Liebert, an architect active in the early twentieth century, designed the Fenlon Hotel and the Robert Swett residence in Rhinelander. (Unidentified Obituary. No Date. Humanities Room, Milwaukee Central Library. Possibly Rhineland Daily News June 1, 1992)

To date, aside from the projects that Liebert designed late in his career in Rhinelander, we know of only the commission for Christ Church at 5655 N. Lake Drive in Whitefish Bay and the house designed for George A. Sievers at 3173 S. 31st Street. We do not know the location of the house on Bay Ridge. Without an inventory of Carl Liebert's works, it is difficult to assess the Sievers House within the evolution of Liebert's career and to determine whether the Sievers commission influenced his later work. It is, however, a house that breaks away from the historicism so common of pre-World War II dwellings, and provides a unique solution to a challenging site. Also unique is the floor plan, siting the kitchen and dining room at the front of the house facing the street while the living room was positioned so that it would have views out of the rear of the house. The master bedroom as well was built as a wing off the west wall of the house, enabling it a private view of the terrace.

SOURCES

Great Lakes Bulletin. July 21, 1995.

Milwaukee Central Library. Biographical information on Carl Liebert.

Gregory, John B. History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milwaukee: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1931.

Milwaukee City Building Permits.

Milwaukee County Register of Deeds.

Milwaukee Journal

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the George A. Sievers House at 3173 S. 31st Street be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee historic site as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-5 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

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

Rationale: The George A. Sievers House is significant as an early exploration of the modernist aesthetic applied to a modest dwelling in Milwaukee. It turned its back on period revival design, applied architectural detail, and the traditional floor plan seen in earlier residences. Using clapboard siding and a traditional gable roof, the house, while modern, avoided the overt references to the International Style and Moderne Style then popular, scattered examples of which could be found in the Milwaukee metro area. Architect Carl Liebert, well into his practice at the age of 38, designed a house to fit a unique sloping lot and provide private space for some of the family's most important rooms. He designed the Sievers House with functionality in mind and the interior floor plan dictated the exterior appearance.

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

Rationale: The George A. Sievers House has been recognized by area residents as being the different house on the block, designed especially for its site. Built into the side of a hill and with a wooded side yard, the house has been a visual landmark in its neighborhood since the time of its construction.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Building maintenance and restoration must follow accepted preservation practices as outlined below. Review of maintenance projects with historic preservation staff is required to ensure the best practices are followed. Note: this designation and the guidelines include the Sievers house, the small office/study at the rear of the property, and the entire property, including the corner lot (Lot 15). As in all designations, historic status does not require the removal of alterations made prior to the designation.

A. Roofs

Retain the appearance of the gabled roofs. Skylights are discouraged but may be added to roof slopes not visible from the street or public right of way. No additional stories may be added to the roof, as this would alter the original form of the building. No major changes can be made to the roof shape, which would alter the building

height, roofline or pitch. Locate mechanical systems and vents on portions of the roof not visible from the public right of way and paint them out to minimize impact.

Satellite dishes should not permanently damage the historic structure. Owners are encouraged to place them out of public view, at the side or rear elevations and not on the principal façade.

The proposed addition of skylights, satellite dishes, and re-roofing require review by Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone must not be painted or covered. Painting masonry is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date. Covering masonry with other materials (wood, sheet metal, vinyl siding, etc.) is not allowed. The concrete block used at the foundation/lower level appears to have been parged and is now painted. This might have been the original treatment. It appears in a 1959 photo of the house.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, hardness, texture, joint finish and joint width. See the masonry chapters in the books, As Good As New or Good For Business for explanations on why the use of a proper mortar mix is crucial to making lasting repairs that will not contribute to new deterioration of the masonry. Replaced mortar joints should be tooled to match the style of the original. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before starting any repointing and one or more test panels must be prepared and approved before work can proceed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting or high pressure water blasting or the use of other abrasive materials (baking soda, nut shells, etc.) on limestone, terra cotta, pressed brick, cream brick or concrete surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone. Work should be done by experienced individuals. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any cleaning would begin.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any work would proceed on repairs to the concrete block.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that do not duplicate the appearance of the original materials. Covering wood or metal with aluminum or vinyl or other substitute material is not permitted. Vinyl, steel, aluminum, or composition siding is not allowed. Selected clapboards can be replaced in kind if there is found to be deterioration.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design and material of the original window sash or door. New glass must match the size of the historic glass. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block. Avoid using modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

Vinyl, vinyl-clad, metal or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block basement windows are not permitted where visible from the public right of way. Changes to doors and windows require consultation with Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

3. Steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for this type of installation.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing historic trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required for any proposed changes or repairs to the trim features.

E. Additions

The projecting front garage and the recessed front porch are significant design features of the house. Also significant is the way the house is built into the slope of the hill and allows for a partially above grade lower level on the south and east elevations. No additions will be permitted on the east (front) or south (right) elevations. The recessed front porch may not be permanently enclosed. It is not anticipated that there would be additions to the north elevation due to the proximity of the property line. Any other addition would require the approval of the Commission.

Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the building. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of window size and placement, building height, roof configuration, scale, design, color, and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right of way. Additions must be smaller than the building and not obscure the historic building.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light with the historic and architectural character of the building. Plastic internally illuminated box signs are not permitted.

G. Site Features

The slope of the hill, the stairway at the north end of the building, and the wooded natural appearance of the corner lot are all essential feature of the site. The Sievers House is best viewed/read from the corner, looking north/northwest. New plant materials, paving, fencing, or accessory structures (gazebos, potting sheds, equipment sheds, etc.) shall be compatible with the historic character of the building and consideration will be given to whether or not the site features are visible from the public right-of-way. No front yard fencing will be allowed as this is not in the character of the house or the adjacent neighborhood. Low fencing or a low landscape hedge along the side lot may be considered if privacy/vandalism concerns arise. Parking is limited to the front garage and driveway. No parking lot or parking pad or driveway may be constructed on the remainder of the property. Major landscape changes to the side yard/lot will require review by the Commission or staff to ensure that the house can be viewed as the architect intended. Retention of the natural appearance of the corner lot is important in the interpretation of the house.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the structure. No principal dwelling, apartment building, condominium, parking structure or commercial/office/medical/religious or other building shall be constructed on the side yard/lot along W. Euclid Avenue/S. 31st Street. This parcel was acquired by the original owner and provides an appropriate setting for the house. Small scale accessory structures, like a gazebo or fountain or pool or pergola, may be permitted depending on their size, scale and form and the property's ability to accommodate such a structure. If new construction would somehow apply to the property, the following guidelines would apply. It is

important that new construction be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the structure.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the building. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the building from the street as a freestanding structure.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the building. New construction is to be smaller in size and shorter in height than the historic building.

3. Form

The massing of the new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the building as a freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and receded from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in close proximity to it.

4. Materials

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

I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

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

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

George A. Sievers House
3173 and 3179-81 S. 31st St

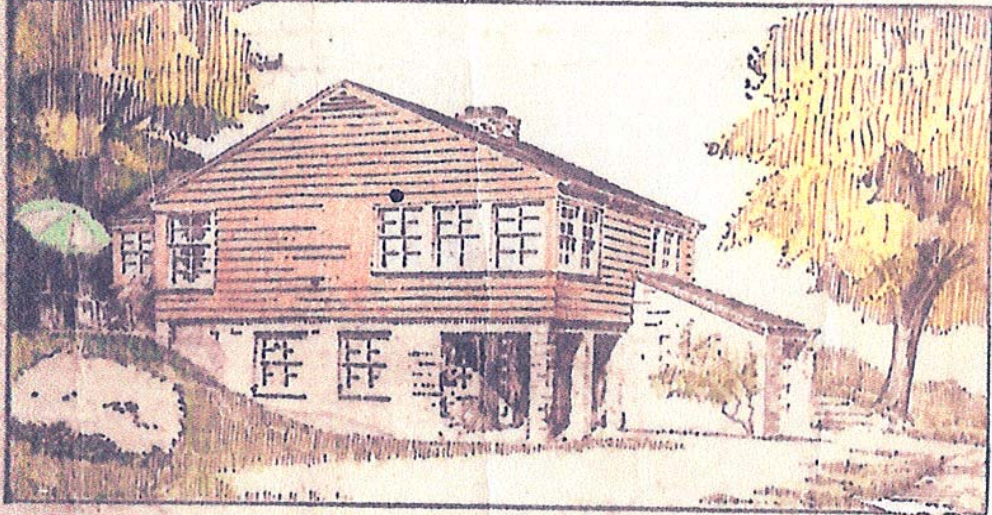


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Uniquely Planned House



CARL LIEBERT, architect, has designed an unusual residence (shown above), at 3173 S. 31st st., for George A. Sievers. The home, of frame and cement block construction, is to be built on a 40 foot lot, and the natural slope of the lot is to be retained. The garage and entrance to the house are on street (basement) level, directly accessible to the recreation room and laundry. An electric communication system connects the basement level entry and the kitchen, which is on the first floor. A folding door over counter space in the kitchen opens to create a snack bar in the living room. There is a private outdoor terrace off the living room at the top of the slope at the rear of the house. The living room has a fireplace nook with a built-in seat.

SIEVERS HOUSE IN 1959



1959