

HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION APPLICATION

1. Name

Historic: The George and Louise Knowles House

and/or Common: Cambridge House

2. Location

Street & number 1879 N. Cambridge Avenue

Aldersperson: Nik Kovac

District(s): 3

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Present Use			
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> park	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> cemetery	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> other
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> religious	<input type="checkbox"/> military	
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private-residence	<input type="checkbox"/> museum	

4. Owner of Property

Name: Susan E. Ellman

Street & number: 1879 N. Cambridge Avenue

City:

State

Zip 53202

5. Representation Existing Surveys

Inventory: unknown

Date:

federal state county local

Depository for survey records:

Organization n/a

Street & number

City

State

Zip

Previous historic designation:

<input type="checkbox"/> National Register	Date	Name	
<input type="checkbox"/> City of Milwaukee Landmark	Date	Name	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Name of Program			Date designated

6. DESCRIPTION

Condition:

- excellent
- good
- fair
- deteriorated
- ruins

Check one:

- original site
- moved date
- altered
- unaltered

Building form:

Number of stories 3

Foundation:

- stone
- brick
- concrete block
- concrete
- other

Roof:

- gable (flank end cross)
- gambrel (flank end cross)
- hip
- mansard
- flat
- other

Walls:

- clapboard
- brick
- stucco
- stone
- wood shingle
- slate
- terra cotta
- asphalt siding
- asbestos tile
- aluminum siding
- artificial stone
- other

Written description: (Continue on a separate sheet, if necessary)

The house is one of two matching side-by-side frame dwellings with limestone block foundations and "Cream City brick" veneer, built in 1875 or 1876 in Italianate/Victorian Gothic style. Exterior features include a colonnaded front porch with original Victorian posts and cast iron cresting, with stairs, deck, skirting, and balustrade rebuilt in 2002, some original exterior trim, including cornices and ornamental bargeboards, a rear deck added in 2002 (built to accommodate an old bulkhead basement door) with baluster boards that match those on the front porch, an original 24" porthole window, a stained glass bathroom window to replace one cut out of the brick in the 1930s, and an asphalt shingle roof installed in 2002.

Interior features include a curved front staircase and back stairs from the kitchen to the second floor, 2,934 square feet of living space, including five rooms and half bath on first floor, four bedrooms and two baths on second floor, ten foot ceilings and eight foot double hung windows, four panel doors, original moldings (crown, chair rail, baseboards, plinth blocks, door and window frames), hardwood floors throughout (with exception of basement, attic, and two bathrooms) some original and some beveled in two colors, three marble fireplaces, one woodburning and two coal burning, one in a second floor bedroom, five original plaster ceiling rosettes, a kitchen remodeled in 2002 restoring the original floor plan in historically sensitive style, a Victorian style powder room dating to 2002, a master bath (added in the 1930s) remodeled in 1990, a finished attic with four rooms and bath, and a central forced air furnace and air conditioning (zoned) installed in 2004.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Areas of significance:

<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	
<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion	

Date built or altered: 1875 or 1876

Builder/architect: owner hopes to identify builder soon, upon further research

Written statement of significance: (continue on a separate sheet, if necessary)

Hundreds, if not thousands, of people around the United States and in Canada have treasured the house at 1879 N. Cambridge Avenue, have warm memories of it, and feel that the time they spent there changed them, their relationships, and their lives for the better. Human service professionals all over the Milwaukee area and beyond mourned the demise of Cambridge House, Inc., the training center that occupied the building from 1959 to 1982.

The house, situated near historic Brady Street, is one of only two surviving Victorian single-family dwellings on Cambridge Avenue, if not in the larger neighborhood. Every other house of that vintage on Cambridge Avenue was either converted to a rooming house or apartment building during the twentieth century or demolished and replaced with a low rent apartment building during the 1960s or 1970s. The closest Victorian, four doors to the south, burned down in a twenty-first century fire.

Built in 1875 or 1876 by George Knowles of "Cream City brick" in Italianate/ Gothic style, 1879 N. Cambridge matches 1903 N. Cambridge, the house next door to the north. Facing them from across the street, 1879 is the one on the left. Mr. Knowles originally intended that his daughter, Mrs. Murdock should inhabit the house on the right, but she moved to California, and Emily Parker Groom, a noted artist, bought it in 1891. Miss Groom lived in the house on the right until 1974. The house on the left had a much more dramatic history and many more owners. Because city directories before 1920 did not list properties by address, only an examination of public records can reveal who owned the house between 1894, when Mr. Knowles died, and 1921, when the Tapping family sold it to the Van Brunt family. The Van Brunt family sold it to the Maxon family in 1937, and Glenway Maxon sold it some time between 1959 and 1961 to the Community of St. Martha, also known as the Milwaukee Lay Academy and Cambridge House.

Under executive director Ruth Morrison, a psychologist, theology instructor at Downer College, and education consultant to the Episcopal diocese, this institution corresponded to the Esalen Institute in California, founded at the same time. It organized retreats and seminars and trained people in psychotherapy and interpersonal and leadership skills, pioneering Sensitivity Training, Encounter therapy, and the Renewal or Human Potential movement in the Midwest. Morrison and her assistant lived in the house, where they had offices and a chapel on the third floor, and they although they worked with three or four different Christian denominations, they upheld an ecumenical or interfaith philosophy. People stayed in the house when they attended 30-day seminars. With time, religion became less of a focus, and Cambridge House outgrew the space at 1879 N. Cambridge and purchased an additional property, 1900 N. Cambridge across the street. In time, David B. Henderson, MD replaced Morrison as the executive director.

The counseling center went out of business in 1982 and sold the building to James Boerner, an architect and member of one of Milwaukee's foremost gardening families. Boerner sold it in 1986 to a couple of newlyweds, Barry and Susan Ellman, who raised three children in the house, the first in half a century. The Ellman family lives at 1879 N. Cambridge to this day.

8. Major Bibliographical References

Milwaukee Journal, Milwaukee Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal, Capitol Times

9. Property Description

Acreage: less than one acre

Legal property description:

Lot 4 in Block 242, in Cambridge Subdivision, being a part of U.S. Fractional Lot 6, in the North East 1/4 of Section 21 in Township 7 North Range 22 East, in the City of Milwaukee, County of Milwaukee, and State of Wisconsin

10. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Susan E. Ellman

Organization: n/a

Street: 1879 N. Cambridge Avenue

City: Milwaukee

State: Wisconsin

Zip: 53202

Telephone (days) 414.272.3294

(evenings) same

Date: December 12, 2012

Return to: Historic Preservation
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Room B-4
Milwaukee, WI 53202

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