

**HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT
MILWAUKEE FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREHOUSE
LADDER COMPANY NO. 5
(October 2003)**

I. NAME

Historic: Milwaukee Fire Department Fire House, Ladder Company No. 5.

Common: Kortsch Storage

II. LOCATION

1945 N. Bartlett Avenue

Legal Description: Cambridge Subd NO 2 of a Part of LOT 1 in NE ¼ SEC 21-7-22
BLOCK 244 E'LY ½ LOT 1

3rd Aldermanic District
Alderman Michael S. D'Amato

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Resource Management
2403 N. Maryland Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Nominator

Michael Elfe

V. YEAR BUILT

1886¹

Architect

Sebastian Brand²

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

¹ Date Plaque on building. Sixteenth Annual Report of the Fire Department of the City of Milwaukee for the Year Ending December 31, 1886, p. 10

²Landscape Research, Built in Milwaukee (Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee, 1981), pp. 104-105.

Milwaukee Fire Department Ladder Company No. 5 Firehouse is located in the city's Lower East Side neighborhood approximately one and a half miles from the Central Business District. It occupies a corner lot, approximately 30-foot by 89-foot in dimension, at the southwest corner of N. Bartlett Avenue and E. Irving Place. The building occupies virtually all of its lot with no landscaping at the sides, front or rear. The neighborhood is predominantly residential with numerous one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half story single family and duplex houses clustered together on small lots. A few commercial buildings are interspersed through the neighborhood and Holy Rosary Church (1885) is located a few blocks away. Residential construction took place in the 1880's and peaked in the 1890's with a few infill houses and houses moved on to vacant lots in the 20th century.

Ladder Company No. 5 Firehouse is a two-story, rectangular, cream brick building with flat roof resting on a rusticated limestone block foundation. The High Victorian Italianate style building fronts east onto Bartlett Avenue. The north elevation extends along Irving Place. The south elevation overlooks a small house and at the rear there is just enough room for a walkway along the building. Typical to firehouse design, the building is located at a corner for ease of egress. Also typical in this era the façade is divided into three bays by tall pilasters and details are organized around the large central apparatus entrance. To the south or left of the apparatus door is located the pedestrian door and to the right is a tall narrow window. Tall windows are located in the outer bays on the second story while windows are paired above the apparatus door. Ornament is achieved through the use of stone for lintels and sills and for the belt course below the second story windows, in the decorative brickwork below the belt course and corbelling at the eaves. The center bay is crowned with a pediment that features a stone rondel bearing the date of 1886. Embellishing this pediment is a sheet metal cornice with corbels, end blocks, dentils and geometric patterns.

The north elevation features tall narrow windows arranged according to utility, each with stone lintels and sills. The corbelling at the top of the wall extends from front to rear. One second story opening still retains its original wood hayloft door. A ghost sign reading Kortsch Storage Co. survives between the first and second story.

The rear or west elevation features two windows on the second story and a door on the first. They are trimmed in brick and not stone as the other elevations.

The south elevation is virtually windowless and located a few feet from the adjacent house.

Alterations to the building have been minimal. The primary features of the façade remain intact except for the engine door which was replaced with a metal roll up door many decades ago. Historic photos show that the opening was originally filled by double doors articulated with horizontal panels of which the topmost panels were filled with glass. The doors were surmounted by a four-light transom. The projecting bay on the north elevation was originally capped with a corbelled gable according to historic photos but the gable was removed at an unknown date and some scars are evident. The short tower-like projection on the west end of the roof was built to accommodate the elevator installed in 1924. From historic photos it appears that the windows were always simple one-over-one sash. The window and pedestrian door on the main façade were topped with transoms. Most of the windows were boarded up after 1986. Brick pavers once extended up from the street to the front wall of the building. Interestingly, the building was constructed without the ubiquitous tower, probably because it served a ladder and chemical company which did not require hoses.

Significance

The Milwaukee Firehouse Ladder Co. No. 5 is significant as an important example of civic architecture from the 1880's. It was a symbol of the city's first attempts at standardizing station house design in an attempt to provide a state of the art facility that was economical as well as recognizable to the populace. It is also significant as the earliest surviving station house designed by Sebastian Brand, a Milwaukee firefighter who was elevated to the role of Fire department architect and who put his distinctive stamp on station house design for over 20 years. Brand was the first municipal employee assigned to design buildings for the city and left a legacy of finely detailed High Victorian Italianate structures, of which only a small number survive.

VIII. HISTORY

Fire Department History

Milwaukee's fire department began as a volunteer effort in 1837 with the creation of the village of Milwaukee. The first company, Hook and Ladder No.1, included such notables as Alexander Mitchell. The meager equipment was purchased by the companies themselves or by benefactors and was kept at the city's first firehouse, a shed on East Wisconsin Avenue. Early volunteers came from all walks of life. Grateful storekeepers and hotel managers would frequently feed the volunteers during bouts of fire fighting. Members were also expected to help quiet civil disturbances when called upon. By 1859 there were some eleven volunteer companies in the city. (*History of Milwaukee* 1881 p. 346-347, 358, 362)

In 1861 a half-pay department was inaugurated whereby firemen would hold regular daytime jobs but be on standby for emergencies. Equipment consisted of hand pumped engines, hoses and ladders. The work was arduous, dangerous and fires were frequent. (*History of Milwaukee* 1881 p. 370) In 1874 a regular, full time, paid fire department was instituted, administered by a chief engineer who was appointed by the mayor and subject to confirmation by the Common Council. By 1885 the force consisted of 119 men and ten steam engines. It was in that year that the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners was created to rectify abuses in the appointment of the fire chief and chief of police. The Commission was empowered to set employment standards and examine candidates for positions in the fire and police departments. It also had the authority to appoint the respective chiefs and the power to remove them from office. (*Milwaukee Board of Fire and Police Commissioners* p. 6) Largely through the efforts of the Commission, the Fire Department has remained a stable and well-run institution. In the 1930's and 1940's the department won achievement awards from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for fire safety and waste management. (*Milwaukee Board of Fire and Police Commissioners* p. 10)

Since the time that the fire department became a full department of city government, its history has been one of continued growth and adaptation to new technology. The first motor driven engine was put into use in 1914 and the last horse drawn apparatus was retired in 1928. A fire prevention bureau was organized in 1915 and a Drill School instituted in 1922. From 1889 to 1984 the department also ran fireboats along Milwaukee's 27 miles of canal, river and lake frontage. In addition to fire fighting, the fireboats were used for ice breaking, snow dispersal, lifesaving and pumping water to land engines. An underwater rescue team was formed in 1962 and since 1980 the department has also provided the city with paramedics. Through the paramedical unit, the force's first two women joined the department in 1981 and the first woman graduated from the training academy in 1982. (*Milwaukee Board of Fire and Police Commissioners* p. 12, 16, 17; *Menomonee Valley Industrial Survey* 1979)

Fire House Design

Fire station design has always constituted an interesting and colorful part of the city's architectural heritage. Early buildings tended to be makeshift sheds as reported above but substantial brick stations were constructed by the 1860's, even before the institution of a full-time force. These buildings were constructed of local cream color brick, were generally two stories high and featured prominent front or side towers that served as watchtowers and a place for a signal bell. In later years hoses would be hung to dry in these towers as well. These towers were among the most prominent features of the 19th century skyline, rivaled only by the soaring steeples of the city's churches. Sometimes the buildings would accommodate horses or an adjacent stable structure would be built for the animals.

The firehouses themselves took on the prevailing styles of the day but featured large apparatus entrances and the aforementioned towers. Their sturdy construction and fine architectural design were prominent visual reminders of the importance that the city accorded public services and fire fighting in particular. Firehouses could be found within residential and industrial sections of the city even before branch police stations were conceived of.

The earliest surviving station building is located at 411 North 3rd street, built in 1866. The Italianate style cream brick structure underwent significant remodeling in 1901 with the removal of its 76-foot tower and the addition of a new façade. In recent years more remodeling has obscured the side elevations as well. A fairly well preserved example from the 1870's is the Chief Lippert Co. No.1 station at 642 W. North Avenue. It was built in 1876 and designed by local architect Thomas Philpot. The cream brick Italianate building had a prominent front gable, bracketed cornice and wooden corner tower, now reduced in size from its original height. No longer used by the fire department, the old doors have been converted into windows and the brick has been painted. Since the 1970's the building has housed the Inner City Arts Council. The Chief Lippert Station is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

As the city grew rapidly in size and density, the old way of contracting out design and construction of firehouses became too costly and lengthy. To quote *Built in Milwaukee*:

In 1885, under the leadership of Chief James Foley, the department embarked upon a new program to control and standardize the design and construction of firehouses. He directed Sebastian E. Brand, foreman of Engine 9 and an ex-mason, to design all the new stations. Brand's work expressed both the increased concern for functionalism and a stolid masonry interpretation of Victorian styles. He often mixed Gothic and Classical detailing in generally vertical elevations. At least ten of Brand's designs – spanning nearly three decades – survive today, either in continuous use as fire engine houses or with a new use. Many of the smaller buildings were remarkably similar employing a two-story, three-bay design. In this scheme, two smaller bays with narrow windows [and a pedestrian door] flanked a central engine door. Otherwise straight cornices were varied on some structures by an inset gable over the central bay. A corner tower was sometimes added. (page 104)

About 1915, the city's Bureau of Bridges and Public Buildings took charge of the design and construction of firehouses. As trucks replaced horses, Brand's work was supplanted by that of Charles E. Malig of the bureau who, like his predecessor, was a fixture in the engine house design role for several decades.

In the first decade that the Bureau of Bridges and Buildings took over design, two known firehouses were built, both in 1915, Engine Company House No. 32 at 3920 W. Vliet Street, and the fireboat station for Engine No. 15 at 105 North Water Street. Permit records show Charles

Malig as the architect of record for both. While the building on Vliet Street can be considered Classical Revival in style, the two-story form and vertical emphasis carry over from the earlier station models. The fireboat house is more eclectic in style befitting its more unique function, and is two stories in height but with a horizontal emphasis. It was not until the 1920's that station house design would take a dramatic turn.

It was during the 1920's that the city experienced its greatest period of expansion up to that time. In 1920 Milwaukee's land area consisted of 26.089 miles, a figure that had increased to 43.109 square miles by 1930. Milwaukee's population also boomed from 373,857 residents in 1910 to 457,447 persons in 1920 to 578,249 in 1930. (John Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, p. 248) Such increases were accompanied by an unprecedented development boom whereby scores of new middle class subdivisions were platted and built up and new neighborhood commercial districts blossomed. Such construction was welcomed and seen to alleviate the severe housing shortage experienced in the late teens and early 1920's. Interestingly the 1924 Report of the Common Council indicated that Milwaukee was the most congested of the large cities in the US after New York City but that aggressive annexation was changing this status. Although the era popularized the period revival styles such as the Tudor and Colonial or Georgian, the predominant house type of the era was the bungalow and its larger incarnation, the bungalow flat or duplex. While the latter was often two and a half stories in height, the bungalow hugged the ground at a single story or story and a half giving the new neighborhoods a regularity and orderly quality not seen in the 19th century neighborhoods.

In the early years of fire fighting, crews would rely on watchtower observation to located evidence of fires. The first alarm system with call boxes was installed in 1869 with 45 street boxes by which any citizen could ring in an alarm. By 1926 there were 988 alarm boxes throughout the city. This would be relayed to the firehouse in closest proximity. Telephone service became significant in speeding up the response time especially when phones became commonly installed in private residences and businesses. Motorization of equipment began in 1914, was about 70% complete by 1921 and fully realized in 1927. (1921 Report of the Common Council p. 29; 1927 Report of the Common Council p. 31) This led to the elimination of the fleet of 250 horses once used by the department and also their harnesses, haylofts and the other necessities required by these animals. Different kinds of apparatus were required for the motorized vehicles. In addition to these changing technologies, the city began a pro-active approach to fighting fires. Surveys were made of various districts throughout the city and the elimination of fire hazards became paramount. The 1926 Report of the Common Council boasted that all buildings in the fire limits (downtown, industrial, and local business districts) were inspected four times yearly and that buildings outside these limits were inspected twice yearly. Instruction and demonstrations were given on fire safety during fire prevention week, radio spots were made and lectures given. Publications were distributed throughout the public schools. The 1924 Report of the Common Council boasted that many commercial and factory buildings of mill construction had been eliminated in recent years (page 42). Some 400 buildings were razed in 1928 alone, of which 350 were frame structures. (1928 Report of the Common Council p. 37)

With this shift toward a modern fire department came the need for firehouse design changes that would reflect the new and more efficient operation. Since most of Milwaukee's growth during this time period was in the residential sector, it became paramount that the new fire engine houses be located in the neighborhoods and that they blend in with the predominant architectural forms of the day. City architect Charles Malig, with the Bureau of Bridges and Public Buildings, came up with a novel design for a low, residential scale building to house the fire engines and firemen. The brick veneered structures took on architectural detailing from the Colonial Revival and had the appearance of well-built, upscale houses. The Bungalow firehouse

was the result. A number of these were built in the 1920's and several are locally designated under a thematic designation. The 1920's represented the high point of firehouse design.

With the onslaught of the Great Depression and World War II, firehouse designs reverted to a more utilitarian appearance with simple Art Deco or Moderne details from the 1930's through early 1950's. Stations also reflected the simpler housing being constructed in the outlying sections of the city. Block-like structures, devoid of any architectural detail, were the norm in the post WW II era and can be seen even in some of the older neighborhoods as the 19th century firehouses were replaced with newer buildings. More recent efforts in the 1990's have seen a return to more stylish buildings and newer stations have re-introduced towers and interesting massing into their design.

Ladder Company No. 5

City services tended to follow in the wake of development and neighborhood-based firehouses were seen as a critical component in the efficient handling of the fires outside the Central Business District. In 1876 the need for four new firehouses was determined and the Lower East Side was chosen as the site for one of them. Brady Street was beginning to develop, the East Village area was becoming populated with Polish immigrant families and impressive new mansions were under construction along Prospect Avenue. This neighborhood was a considerable distance from the firehouse on Broadway so there was no opposition to locating a facility here. The southwest corner of Brady and Franklin Place was chosen as the site for the firehouse. Architect Thomas N. Philpot designed the building although local architect Henry Koch also submitted plans for the project. The \$15,450 building was completed in December of 1876 and named after the city's current mayor, A.A.R. Butler. Engine Company 6 that occupied the building was officially organized on February 1, 1877. Designed in the Italianate style, the building resembled the firehouse at 642 W. North Avenue (still standing) that was also designed by Philpot. Butler firehouse was replaced with the current structure in 1946.

Although Engine Company No. 6 handled fires in the survey area; hook-and-ladder assistance was still located in the Central Business District at the firehouse on Broadway. Responding to calls on the Lower East Side left the Business District without protection, so it was determined to organize another hook and ladder company and build a new structure for it in the Lower East Side neighborhood. The resolution for the construction of the facility was introduced to the Common Council on February 1, 1886. It specified that the building be located east of Franklin Street and the Butler Station, on a lot with a frontage of at least 30 feet, and cost no more than \$1,500. A lot at the southwest corner of Bartlett Avenue and Irving Place was purchased for \$700, located in Cambridge Subdivision No. 2. Construction began shortly thereafter. (W.P.A. Old Fire Truck House No. 5, p.3; MS 1886 March 16 3/3)

The lots in the subdivision were selling briskly to investors for a number of years beginning in 1874 when subdividers Joel and Mary Parker of Cambridge, Massachusetts sold the entire block along with other properties to Lewis Rindskopf on October 26, 1874 for \$4,190 or roughly \$261 per lot. (Deeds 140:5) The group of lots was next sold to Caroline Markwell on May 21, 1875 at a price of roughly \$380 per lot. (Deeds 142:314) Subsequent investors included Isadore Markwell (July 6, 1875; \$619 per lot) (Deeds 143:422) and Sigmund Patek (November 1, 1875, \$648 per lot) (Deeds 143:590). Fritz Nieman and his wife Emilie were the first to purchase the future firehouse lot as a single parcel on October 1, 1879 for \$650. (Deeds 160:267). Since the lots in this block all ran through from Cambridge Avenue to Bartlett Avenue, the Niemans sold off the east half, with frontage on Bartlett Avenue, to James M. Cranker for \$415 (Deeds August 7, 1885 202:467) and sold off the west half, with frontage

on Cambridge Avenue to John Joseph Tyson and John Cullen (aka John Ellis) for \$530 (Deeds 206:503 May 18, 1885) thereby making a tidy profit of \$295 on their investment.

James M. and Catherine Cranker later sold their lot to Herman Meminger on March 15, 1886 for \$700, making \$285 on their investment. (Deeds 210:226). Herman and Mary Meminger deeded the property over to the City of Milwaukee that same day for the same amount. (Deeds 210:227)

The new building for Hook and Ladder No. 5 was ready for occupancy on December 1, 1886 and was occupied by the newly organized Hook and Ladder No. 5 and a chemical engine. (MS 1886 December 2 ³/₄) The Board of Public Works Annual Report shows that Charles Kraatz had been awarded the construction contract at a cost of \$5,685, and William Eagan had been awarded the plumbing contract at \$33. Incidental expenses amounted to \$55.78. Total costs were put at \$6,048.78 by the Board of Public Works and \$6,720 in the publication Beer Town Blazes. (Annual Report Board of Public Works, 1887, p. 12; Beertown Blazes p.211)

Hook and Ladder No. 5 was another fine addition to the city's growing inventory of what was then state of the art firehouse design. There were at least 12 firehouses constructed during the 1880's, responding to the tremendous physical expansion of the city that resulted from the influx of immigrants to the city. Hook and Ladder No. 5, sometimes referred to as Fire Truck House No. 5, was one of three completed in 1886. The other two stations completed that year included Hook and Ladder No. 4 at S. 8th and Greenfield and Engine House No. 10 at 176 N. Broadway. Both of these have been demolished. As cited above, the two story brick structures were designed to accommodate both men and machinery. The round arched windows of the Italianate style were replaced by tall rectangular windows arranged symmetrically across the façade. Corbelling was used to define the rooflines and for belt courses between the stories. Prominent sheet metal cornices, sometimes with pediments and date stones, crowned the façade.

Hook and Ladder No. 5 firehouse served the city for 28 years during which time the building was painted several times and other routine maintenance was done by fire department members. Steam heat was installed in the building in 1910. A victim of advancing technology, the 10-man station was discontinued by the fire department in 1914 when automobile squad wagons replaced the horse-drawn hook and ladder apparatus. The motor-driven vehicles were more efficient and could travel long distances in a short time. Ladder Company No. 5 was relocated to share the larger firehouse at the corner of Bartlett Avenue and Park Place, some seven blocks away, with Engine Company No. 27 which had occupied the site since 1903. (W.P.A. Old Fire Truck House No. 5, p. 3)

The old truck house remained vacant thereafter for a number of years. A resolution to sell the building was made in July 1917 in an effort to raise funds for the relocation of Engine Company 27. The action was indefinitely postponed, however, and Truck House No. 5 was used for storage. In 1921 records show that the building was being used as a social service center but the Common Council indefinitely postponed turning over the building to the School Board on a permanent basis despite the need for such a facility in the heavily congested neighborhood. The 1922 city directory indicates that the Irving Athletic Club was an occupant in the building. A request was even made to lease the building to Milwaukee Auto Painting Company, but the city kept the property despite various proposals. A formal offer to purchase the building was received by the city on January 21, 1924 but later withdrawn since the city had only a certificate of title and not an abstract. Finally a full and complete abstract was ordered by the city and the building was sold to the Paul Kortsch Storage Company on August 6, 1924 for \$10,000. The Common Council's decision to finally sell the building followed an

alarmist report from the Department of Public Works that the building was in need of costly repairs and that people were beginning to vandalize the property. Kortsch planned to use the building for furniture storage and as a warehouse. Since that time the building has been used as a storage warehouse. (W.P.A. Old Fire Truck House No. 5, pp. 3-7; Milwaukee City Building Permits)

A number of changes in title have occurred in the years since 1924. The Paul Kortsch Company leased the building to the Kortsch Storage Company for ten years from January 2, 1934 through January 1, 1944 at an annual rent of \$8,000. On February 28, 1944 the Paul Kortsch Company transferred the ownership to Kortsch Storage Company, a co-partnership consisting of William Kortsch, Lester C. Schneider and Edward Zeitler d/b/a/ A.B.C. Kortsch Storage Company at 2409 N. Maryland Avenue. A later lessee, from April 15, 1952 through March 31, 1954, was the St. Paul Terminal Warehouse Co. of St. Paul, Minnesota. Kortsch Storage transferred the building to Kortsch Realty Corporation on January 25, 1954. An option to purchase by Timothy A Kortsch is recorded on December 19, 1985. The current owner, Resource Management, acquired the property in December 1988. Its operating address is the same as A.B.C. Kortsch at 2403 N. Maryland Avenue.

Fire Truck House No. 5 has remained virtually intact on the exterior except for the metal roll-up door which has replaced the double engine doors, the removal of the gable on the north elevation and the boarding up of some of the windows.

The Architect

Sebastian Brand was born in Nierstein on Rhine in Germany on October 23, 1844. He came to the US in 1865 and settled first in Chicago before relocating to Milwaukee. He married Augusta Gesse on February 19, 1871 and the two had thirteen children only two of which survived their father. Brand became a member of the fire department on November 16, 1872 and worked his way up from pipeman to truckman then foreman, lieutenant and finally captain on October 22, 1884, a position he held until his retirement. Having previously worked as a mason, Brand soon was assigned to design and superintend construction of all new firehouses under the administration of Chief James Foley, who, in 1885, began a program to update and standardize station houses. Prior stations were bid out and designed by architects in the private sector such as Thomas Philpot (Chemical, later Engine Co. No. 8 at 642 W. North Avenue 1876 and Engine Co. No. 6 at 1693 N. Franklin in 1877) or Henry C. Koch (Engine Co. No. 9 at 502 N. 17th Street in 1884 and Engine Co. No. 7 at 1803 S. Kinnickinnic in 1885) The desire to expedite the construction process and save money for much needed equipment updates probably motivated Chief Foley in making use of Brand's talent.

Foley writes in 1885 of the firehouse for Engine Co. No.9 at 176 N. Broadway (later rebuilt) that the "building is without doubt one of the finest in the country for the purpose intended, and not alone reflects upon the city and the department, but upon Mr. Brandt [sic], as an architect and superintendent." (15th Annual Report of the Fire Department 1885 p. 10) The following year Chief Foley emphasizes that Brand not only prepared the designs and specifications for the new firehouses but also superintended their construction "without extra compensation" (1886 p. 11) Again in 1887 Foley states that the new firehouses constructed were "certainly very creditable to his ability as an architect and superintendent. The saving to the city and fire department fund for his services alone being about \$1500." (1887 p. 13-14) Sebastian Brand is specifically cited as designer and superintendent in subsequent annual reports of the fire department, perhaps to offset his lack of extra pay with some acknowledgement. In 1894 chief Foley called special attention to the fact that all the departmental repair work and new construction since 1883 were under the supervision of Brand "he attending to his regular

duties as captain of Engine Company No. 5 as well. The direct saving to the city has been in round figures \$14,966.” (1894 p. 26) Brand’s designs are described as “all first class modern fire engine houses and compare favorably with those of any other city of the country.” (1895 p. 18)

All told, Brand produced around 30 station designs in addition to his other duties and received neither extra compensation nor publicity for his work aside from recognition in the annual reports. Most of his buildings were simple, two-story, three-bay, brick structures with prominent cornices and flat roofs. The central engine door bay was flanked by smaller side bays that featured narrow sash windows and pedestrian doors. Gothic and even Classical detailing was utilized and no two houses are identical although the family resemblance is evident. Towers, referred to as hose and lookout towers in the annual reports, often grace the corners of the engine houses although not the hook and ladder houses. Local cream colored brick was used exclusively until the construction of Engine House No. 19 at 100 W. Virginia Street in 1900 when it was noted in the annual reports that St. Louis Hydraulic terra cotta colored pressed brick was used for the main façade. (Annual Report 1900 p. 12)

By 1902 Brand was writing his own section of the annual report and by 1905 was listed as Superintendent of Department Buildings. Changes were beginning to take place, however, within city government. While Brand continued to design all new firehouses and accessory buildings and superintend all repairs to the buildings, carried out by the way by the firefighters themselves, his work began to be routed through the Board of Public Works starting around 1904. The Board of Public Works had a number of divisions and the Bureau of Bridges and Public Buildings became the department where all work on bridges and civic buildings became centralized. Over the next decade the Fire Department’s autonomy over the upkeep and construction of firehouses decreased. Whether this was the result of Sebastian Brand’s advancing age or merely part of the reformist reorganization of city government cannot be determined at this time. The emphasis on professional architectural credentials that culminated in the state licensing of architects in 1917 may also have played a part. Old time designers like Brand who came up through the ranks of the building trades were being retired from professional positions in favor of university trained architects who had theoretical knowledge but not necessarily any expertise in construction. In 1915 the shift between the departments had been completed and the Fire Department Annual Report indicates that the Bureau of Bridges and Public Buildings was supervising construction of the new fireboat house at today’s 105 N. Water Street. (Annual Report 1915, page not numbered) The Bureau’s Charles Malig is credited with the design of the new structure and went on to design public buildings, including the popular Bungalow firehouses, through the rest of his long career with the city.

Sebastian Brand retired on pension on July 1, 1919 at the age of 75, an event that received no mention in the annual reports despite his having one of the longest service records (47 years) in the Fire Department. He died on January 24, 1923 at the age of 79. The Old Settlers Club wrote a fine memorial to the man and stated that the thirty-plus firehouses stood as his monument and that he was a “man who expected no credit for the service performed”. (Old Settlers Club Memorials vol. 2, p. 71) Today only about 13 of the Brand-designed firehouses survive, six of which are still in use by the Milwaukee Fire Department. Only one, Engine House No. 21 at 2050 N. Palmer in Brewers Hill, has local designation.

Sources

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IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Milwaukee Firehouse Ladder Co. No.5 be given historic designation at a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

e-1 Its exemplification of the development of the cultural, economic, social, or historic heritage of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.

The Milwaukee Firehouse Ladder Co. No. 5 exemplifies the period in Milwaukee history when fire protection services entered into its first phase of high profile delivery systems that were embodied in prominent structures located within neighborhoods. The new stations made use of the best and most fireproof materials and had interiors arranged to take advantage of the most up to date technical equipment and provide decent living quarters for fire fighters and healthy accommodations for the horses. They were symbols of the new thrust toward profession service. It was also the first

time that the city took on the design of its own buildings without the reliance of outside architects, a move made for reasons of economy but one that gave a distinctive character to all the firehouses for about a twenty-year period.

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

Milwaukee Firehouse Ladder Co. No. 5 is a fine example of High Victorian Italianate design which incorporated straightforward planar facades with pedimented cornices and sheet metal cornices that borrowed detail from the Gothic and Classical design vocabulary.

- 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 of the United States.

Sebastian Brand was probably the first municipal employee to put his stamp on the look of government buildings in Milwaukee. His background as a mason and his understanding of the needs of the fire department from the perspective of an insider enabled him to design structures that had prominence and dignity. The station houses he designed all have a family resemblance and are instantly recognizable, yet no two were alike. Brand was able to vary decorative details, the placement of hose watchtowers, roof shapes, door openings and the like. His vertically oriented buildings meshed well with the commercial and residential neighborhoods in which they were located and were the symbol of the age of the horse drawn engines and ladder trucks. With the dawn of motorized equipment a new architectural vocabulary was supplied by the Department of Public Works and resulted in broader structures ornamented with period revival detail which culminated in the popular Bungalow firehouses of the 1920's.

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. As in all designations, historic status does not require the removal of alterations made prior to the designation. Routine repair and maintenance of these features is permitted. Modifications to any part of the structure, whether original or a later alteration, is subject to review with modifications being defined as changes in cladding, placement, size, material, complete removal and replacement, and so on.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape. Skylights or dormers are discouraged but may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street or public right of way. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, overhang or pitch. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roofing as closely as possible. Construction of rooftop penthouses is discouraged because of their high visibility in this building and the change they would make to the reading of this building as a former firehouse. Rooftop gardens would have to be reviewed by the commission to determine their appropriateness.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural terra cotta or stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed. The use of mortar consisting only of Portland cement is prohibited due to the damage it will cause to brick. Use a mortar formula that matches the original.
- 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 on limestone, terra cotta, brick or cream brick 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.
- 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. Covering stone or brick features with vinyl or aluminum is not allowed.

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 sheet metal cornice is one of the character defining features of the building and its removal is not allowed. If there are deteriorated portions in the cornice, it is recommended that they be repaired than replaced. Historic Preservation staff can assist with this matter.
- 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 trim or sheet metal with aluminum or vinyl is not permitted.

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, material and profiles of the original window sash or door and the framing and mouldings around the openings. 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.
3. Steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed and would be inappropriate on the Bartlett Avenue and Irving Place elevations. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing 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.

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the Bartlett Avenue or Irving Place elevations of the building, as these are the primary facades. Rooftop additions have been addressed under Roofs. Additions to the west or south elevations must be offset from the Bartlett Avenue and Irving Place elevations so the building will still read as a firehouse. Balconies are not allowed on the Bartlett Avenue and Irving Place elevation.

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. Signage is not to be placed over architectural features. Signs are to be installed through existing mortar joints and not through brick, stone or sheet metal. Plastic internally illuminated box signs are not permitted. The retention of the ghost sign in its faded appearance, spelling out Kortsch Storage on the Irving Place façade, is encouraged.

G. Guidelines for New Construction

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

H. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition or removal of a portion of the building 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 non-historic addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

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 Design File - W\Historical\p056.dgn
 Pen Color - pen11br.spu-pen
 Color Table - c1r11br.dwt
 Date Plotted - 09-SEP-2003 7:52:48 AM
 Plot Size - 11.000000 x 8.000000 MILWAUKEE, WI.

Proposed Historic Building
Firehouse Ladder Co. # 5
1945 N Bartlett Avenue


