

# Consideration of the Permanent Historic Designation of the Burnham-Zube House, 1636 W. National Ave ZND October 3, 2023



**230570**

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Resolution relating to the Permanent Historic  
Designation of the  
Burnham-Zube House at 1636 W. National  
Ave., in the 12th Ald. District.



1636 W. National Ave. (760 & 778  
National Ave , old)

Construction & architect date  
unknown

Residence of brick manufacturer &  
civic leader George Burnham in  
1850s-1860s

Residence of social activist and  
street minister John Paul Ranieri and  
his partner Jeff Hicks, 1977-2021









10/3/2023



## George Burnham

- Born in Plattsburgh, New York, 1816
- Learned brick making from his father
- 1831 - moved to Buffalo to practice brick making trade
- 1843 – moved to Milwaukee with brother Jonathan L., est. Burnham Brothers Brick Yard
- Purchased subject property and surrounding 80 acres in 1848
- City directories list him residing at “Mequanago Rd. near Muskego Rd “
- House enlarged and Gothic Revival finishes added



## George Burnham

- Burnham Bros. largest brickyard by 1853, 6M brick/year
- Brothers dissolve partnership in 1856 but operate on adjacent yards
- Moves to larger Italianate mansion c. 1869, cottage “modernized” with Italianate finishes
- Mukwonago Plank Road, Milwaukee & St. Paul (Milwaukee Road) railroad, Burnham Canal
- Trustee and director Northwestern Mutual, member of school and water commissions, Burnham Street
- Died 1889, estate valued at over \$2 M



1853



CARPENTER GOTHIC  
GINGERBREAD  
BRACKETS. VERGEBOARDS

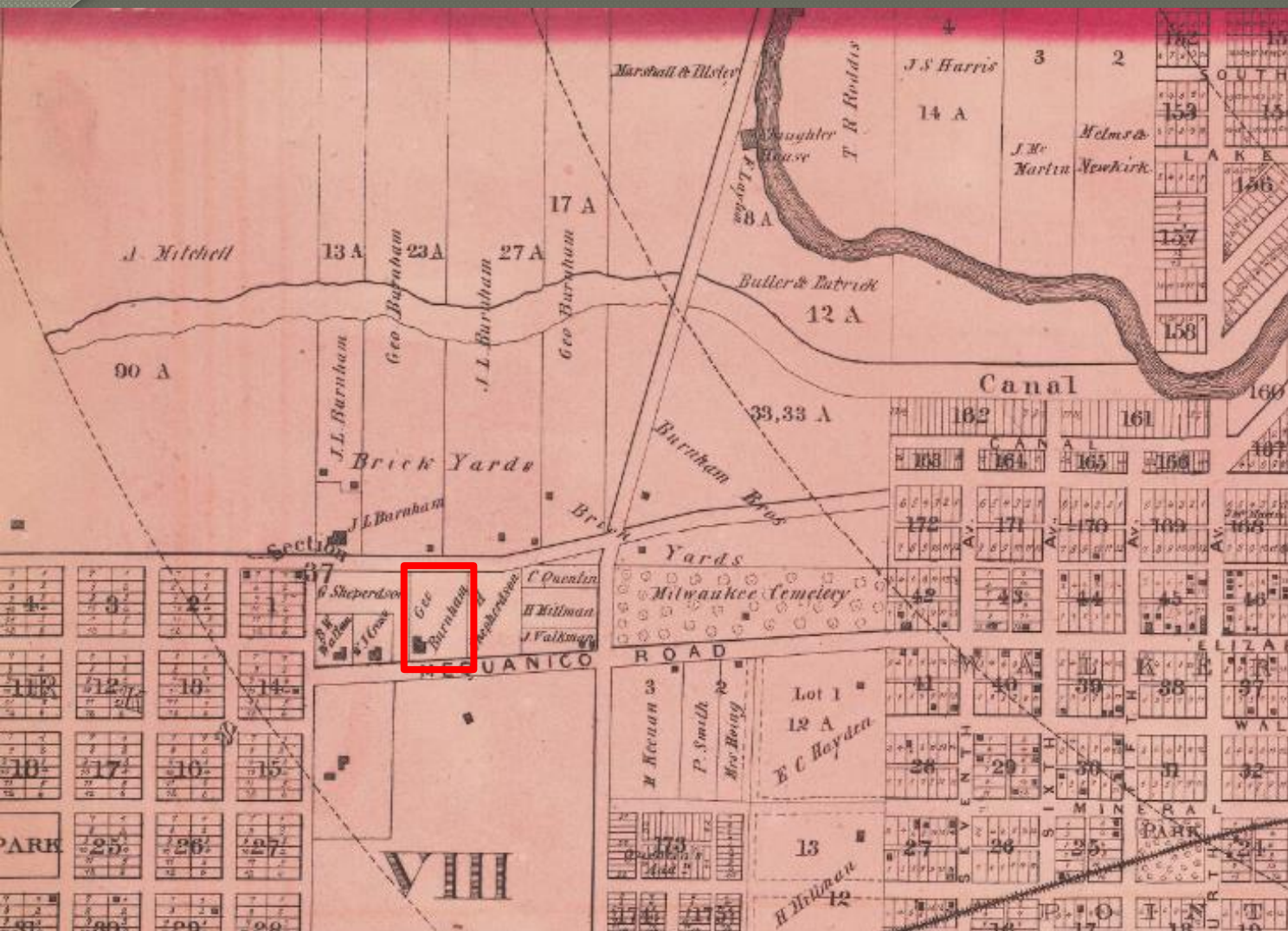
1876 - Italianate Brick Veneer



1901. PORCH ADDED.

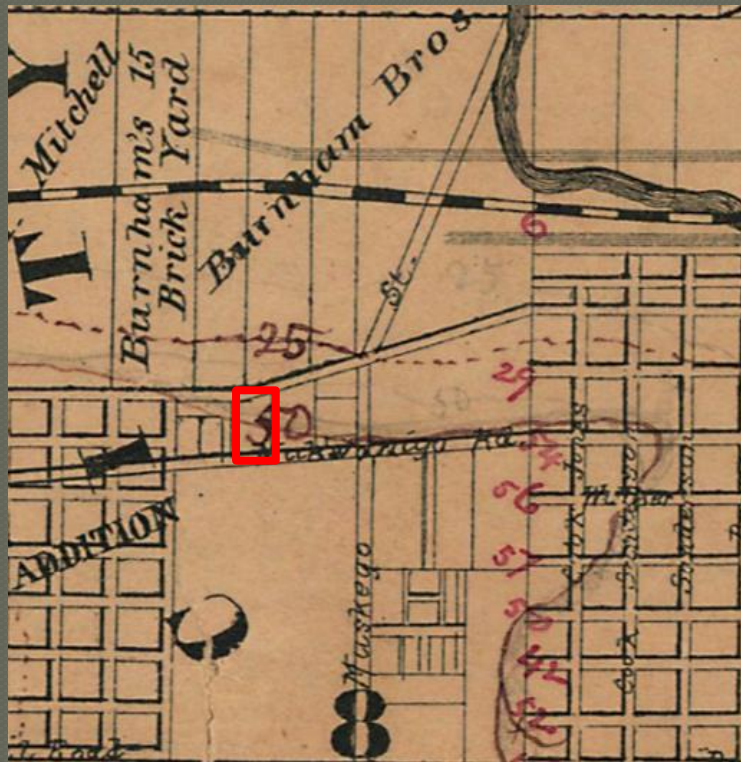




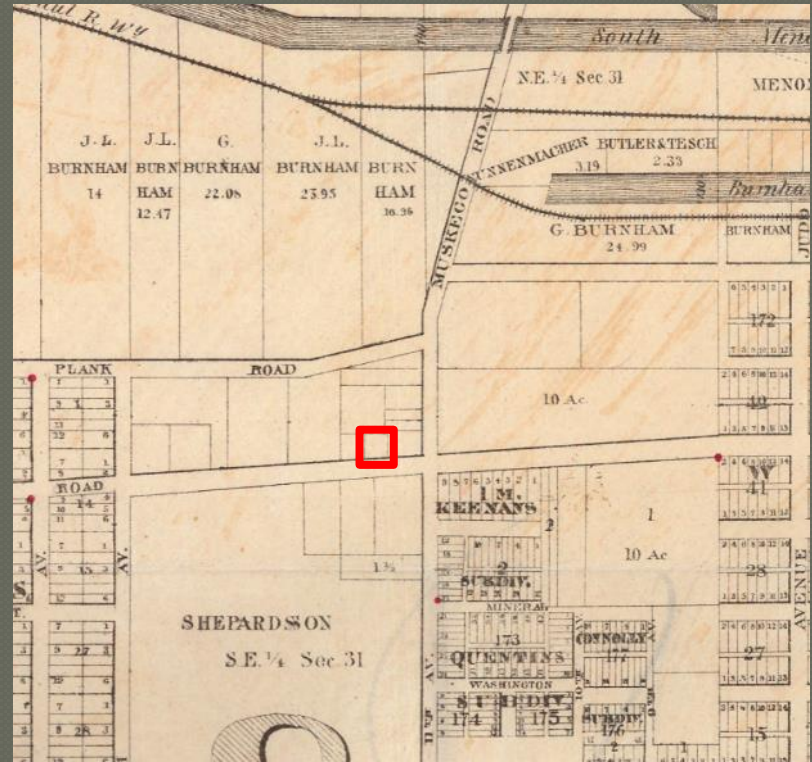


1858 map

10/3/2023

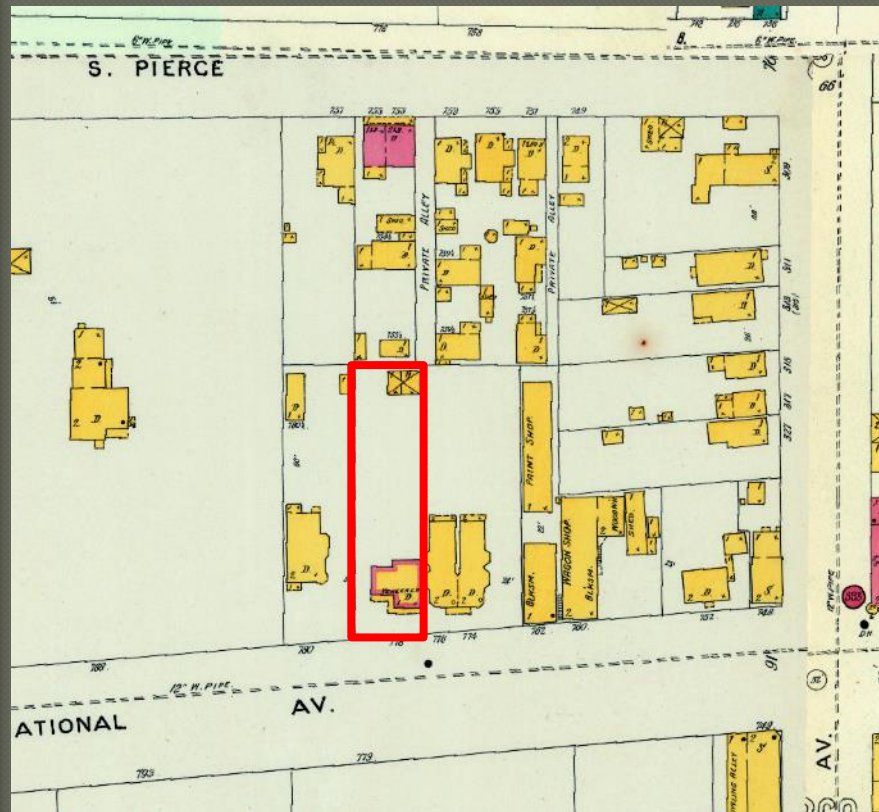


# 1869 map

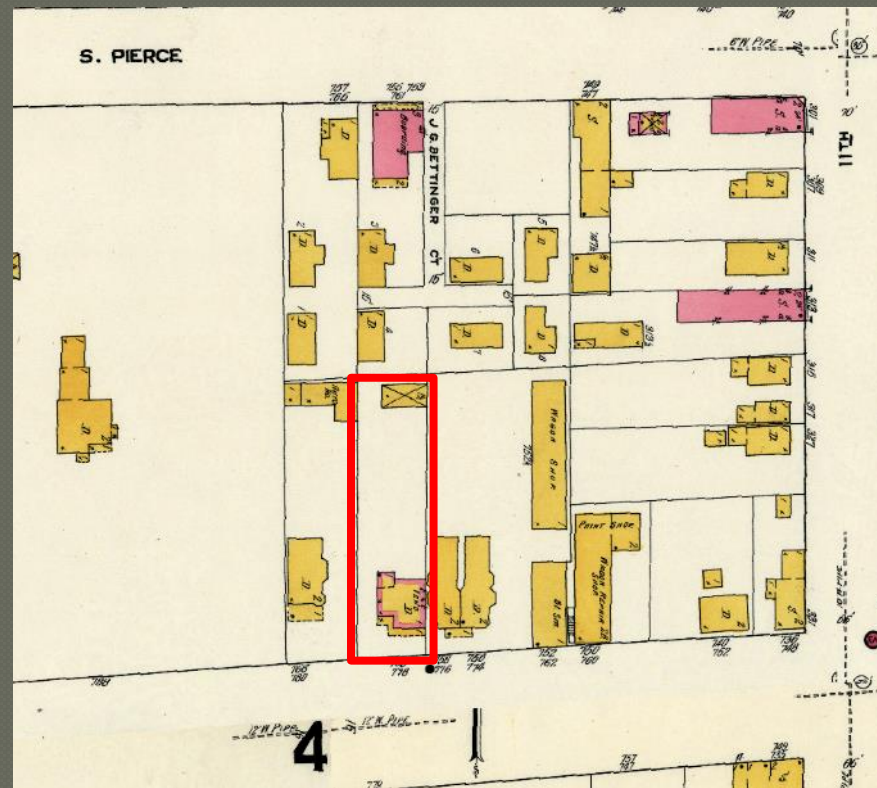


## 1878 map





1894 Sanborn



1910 Sanborn





1873-1889 Frederick Zube  
1889-1892 Patrick Archer  
1892-1940 Charles/Caroline Kropp  
1940-1943 Alma *Kropp* Habermeyer  
1943-1946 Theo/Charlotte Boese  
1946-1977 Charlotte *Kropp* Boese



—Journal Photo

Restoration is planned for this house at S. 17th and National that dates back to 1837

## They Hope to Restore House

By Fran Bauer  
of The Journal Staff

Is the house at S. 17th and National just old and ugly, or an antique that thousands of dollars should be spent to restore?

Both Paul Ranieri and Jeff Hicks, who bought the house last fall and have saved old houses before, believe it is worth preserving. Their eyes are trained on its refurbished future rather than on the crumbling gray hulk that exists today.

Ranieri spotted the more than 140 year old house several years ago and offered to buy it when the owners decided to move. At that point he only suspected the house's age.

Research since has dated the house to 1837, just two years after Calvin Harmon had bought the land from the federal government. When money grew tight, Harmon sold off 80 surrounding acres at \$3 each.

### Meager Days

There were meager days ahead for the house as well as its owner. Its history includes years when it was a rooming house and restaurant, instead of a home. Odds on the

house's future sometimes ran high. During a 1901 poker game, the house changed hands five times.

A walk inside the house today reveals little of its colorful past. Ranieri predicts it will take at least five years to restore the house. He hopes to win financial help from the federal government. If a review board chooses the house as an official landmark, many of Ranieri's costs would be matched with federal dollars.

The uglier part of that work has already begun. Plaster and floor boards have already been pried away to reveal the original foundations from which Ranieri will rebuild.

### Await Future

Antiques lie in disarray, awaiting the future when restored rooms will become their showcase.

Ranieri admits it is depressing to live in the clutter. But he has lived through discouraging days before, he said. What keeps him optimistic is his plan for the future.

Ranieri and Hicks hope to open their home to weekend museum tours when restora-

tion is complete. Eventually, they plan to give the house to the city, to insure its future. But for the present, the two men hope to use the project to show the value of preserving the old.

Part of Ranieri's dream extends well beyond the house. He can envision the commercial strip along S. 18th St. being restored and converted into an old world ethnic shopping area.

### Pledged to Fight

He bemoans the loss of such historic landmarks as St. Jacob's Church, which was razed last year, and he has pledged to fight to save the area's charming old buildings. As part of that fight, Ranieri hopes to run for alderman on the pledge that he will fight to preserve the old South Side.

Ranieri has fought to preserve historic buildings since he was a teenager. His grandparents were wealthy Italians who had brought many of the family's treasures and traditions to America with them. The depression altered the family's fortunes, but not its dreams.

As a college student in New York City, Ranieri de-

veloped his battle techniques. A professor needed help to save old Dutch homes. Ranieri helped to physically block the doorways to wreckers until city officials could be persuaded to save the homes.

There were failures as well as successes in the years ahead. But Ranieri recalls them all as an education. From the skirmishes he learned how to find both public and official support for his projects.

### Unsuccessful Fight

Shortly after his move five years ago to Milwaukee, Ranieri headed the unsuccessful fight to save a Downtown home where author, Edna Ferber had lived. He battled more successfully to keep Lake Dr. homes in Shorewood from being replaced by condominiums, he said.

But not until buying the National Ave. home has Ranieri had a project he felt could really change Milwaukeeans' attitudes on restoration.

"Milwaukee is about five to 10 years behind other major cities in terms of historical restoration," he said.

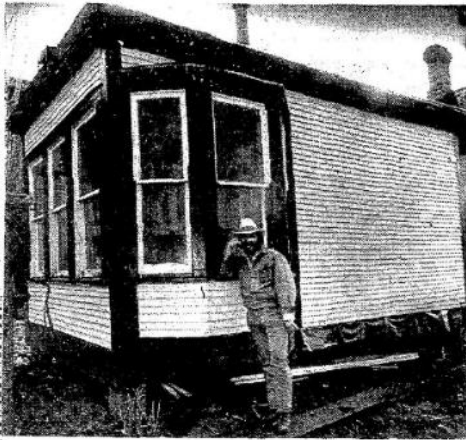
His hope is that others will find restoration to be contagious.



John Paul Ranieri held an icon he plans to use in the chapel

1977-2021 John Paul Ranieri & Jeff Hicks

## John Paul Ranieri & Jeff Hicks



— Journal Photo

The old Wells St. bridge house is now a studio for artist **Jean-Paul Ranieri**. He had it moved to his yard.

### *Old bridge house finds a new home*

The old wooden Wells St. bridge house, built in 1901, has found a new home in a South Side back yard.

The little beige-and-brown structure — it measures 10 by 20 feet — is now the National Ave. studio of artist **Jean-Paul Ranieri**.

Ranieri, who is also an architectural designer, happened to notice the bridge house on a Friday afternoon last March as he stopped to watch workers dismantle the old bridge. The bridge house had been lifted from its piers and placed on the exposed girders in the middle of Wells St.

"How much for the house?" Ranieri asked the crew and offered the wreckers \$1 for it.

The dollar turned out to be a down payment, although Ranieri wouldn't say how much more was needed to complete the deal. But he did say that one of the conditions of the sale was that the house be moved by the next Monday. Moving the house cost \$900.

That accomplished, the bridge house stood in Ranieri's driveway until June, when his house mate, Jeffrey Hicks, completed a foundation for it. In the meantime, the two checked city records and found out when the house was built and stripped the paint down to find the original colors — beige and brown — and gave the house a fresh coat of those colors.

And they bought a new bell, for the city had kept the old one for the new bridge house.

Ranieri and Hicks have made their home an unofficial haven for the homeless, they said. Their effort is not supported by any organization, but they take in anything homeless — "people, animal, plants," Ranieri said.

In a way, he said, buying the bridge house was an extension of that idea. "It was a homeless house," he said.



— Journal Photo

- Removed 1920s addition
- Installed 2/4 windows
- Removed front porch
- Chapel constructed c. 1983
- Wells St. Bridge Keeper's house relocated c. 1985
- Sold to Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative in 2021





South (main) facade



West facade





North facade



North façade - porch



Fireplace surround



Dining room





Chapel west/south facades



Chapel north facade





# Criteria

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- f-3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city.
  - *George Burnham was largest producer of Cream City brick, in contributed to civic activities and commercial development*
- f-5. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristic of an architectural type or specimen.
  - *High integrity example of cream brick vernacular Italianate cottage*



Staff recommends that the Burnham-Zube House be given permanent historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Site as a result of its fulfillment of criteria f-3, and f-5 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 320-21(3) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

