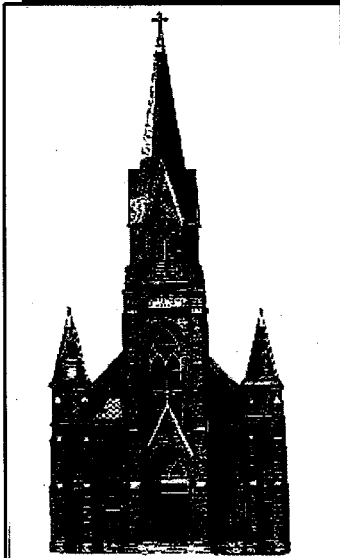


# **Historic Designation Study Report**

## **St. John's Lutheran Church**

4001 South 68<sup>th</sup> Street



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City of Milwaukee  
Department of City Development  
Winter, 2001

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**Revised February 2002**

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## HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

### ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

#### I. NAME

Historic: St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Root Creek

Common name: St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

#### II. LOCATION

4001 South 68<sup>th</sup> Street (church offices)  
6802 West Forest Home Avenue (church building)

11th Aldermanic District, **Vacant as of Feb. 2002**

**Verbal description:** Beginning at a point on the east property line along South 68<sup>th</sup> Street that is 50 feet north of the church building, then west to a point that is 60 feet west of the church building, then south to the intersection of the lot line along West Forest Home Avenue, then northeasterly along the same to a point of intersection with the east lot line, then north along the same to a point of beginning.

The district is in the southwest corner of the church complex which has the following Legal Description: Lands in NW ¼ Sec 22-6-21 Com 418.44' S & 45' W of NE Corn SC ¼ sec- Th S 179.49' -Th SELY alg a cur 36.87' - Th SELY 397.57' - Th s to a pt in NWLY Li of W. Forest Home Avenue- Th SWLY alg Sd NWLY Li 125' m/l - Th N 307' M/L - Th W 208.56' - Th s. 161.334' - Th w 281.16' - Th N 670.56'

-And-

Lands in NW ¼ Sec 22-6-21 Com 927.66' S & 118.80' W of NE Cor SD ¼ Sec- Th S 350.40' Th SWLY 279.90' Th N 530.50' - Th E 208.56' To Beg Exc (Street and Part in Greenfield)

#### III. CLASSIFICATION District

IV. **OWNER:** St. John's Lutheran Congregation  
c/o Rev. Martin Schulz and Rev. Eric Goldschmidt  
4001 S. 68<sup>th</sup> Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53220

V. **DESIGNATION REQUESTED BY:** Mr. Douglas Quigley

VI. **YEAR BUILT:** 1896<sup>1</sup>

**ARCHITECTS:** Herman Paul Schnetzky and Eugene R. Liebert<sup>2</sup>

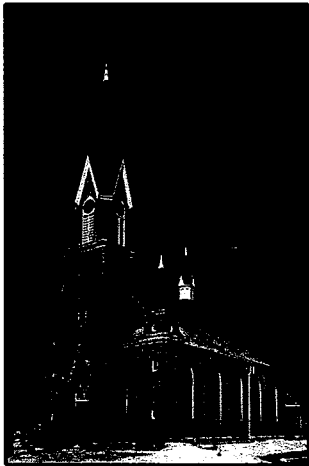
<sup>1</sup> *Germania*, a German-language daily newspaper. April 22, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

### Introduction

St. John's Lutheran Church is an impressive example of Milwaukee's German-inspired, Gothic Revival Style architecture and it is the most important remaining structure associated with the pioneer farming community of Root Creek that thrived around it during the nineteenth century. The soaring central steeple of the church, visible for miles around, is the most prominent architectural feature of the city's far southwest side. To the German-



American farmers who worked in the surrounding fields a century ago, the building was a constant reminder of their religious traditions and the homeland many of them had left behind in the Old World. The barns and farmhouses associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century farming community have all vanished, but the church remains intact and in some ways is better than when it was new. The solid brick walls are built with traditional lime-rich mortar that hardens very slowly and actually becomes stronger with age. In fact, some of the mortar in the center of the walls might have only recently reached a fully cured state.

A school, three houses, two cemeteries and a few small accessory buildings are also part of the church complex that is spread out on a large level lot of approximately 10 acres in size. The features of the complex nominated for local designation are limited to the church, the historic pioneer cemetery in front of it and a narrow band of land around them.

The church complex is located about 8 miles southwest of the city's central business district at the northwest corner of South 68<sup>th</sup> Street and West Forest Home Avenue. The curb line in front of the church property on West Forest Home Avenue is one of the southern boundaries of the Milwaukee city limits. The neighborhood around St. John's is the historic site of Root Creek that was a pioneer outpost founded in the late 1840s. The original settlement has vanished and in its place today is a suburban community of ranch style and colonial houses on South 68<sup>th</sup> Street, and a mixture of bungalows and mid-twentieth century commercial buildings on West Forest Home Avenue.

### The church building

St. John's is a large, cream brick, German Gothic revival, tri-tower church that is positioned about 150 feet north of West Forest Home Avenue and approximately 20 feet west of South 68<sup>th</sup> Street. The building's architectural focal point is a large central steeple that is flanked on either side by a smaller four-sided tower. The square, central tower is topped with an eight-sided spire that is surmounted by a sheet metal cross. St. John's symmetrical, tri-tower massing is a feature strongly associated with German-inspired church design in Wisconsin. Projecting from the ridge of the roof at the center of the building is an eight-sided cupola that is traditionally called a "fleche" which is an old French term that means "arrow."

The front elevation is fenestrated with regularly placed art glass windows that are original to the building. Flanking the central tower on either side is a tall, narrow, Gothic-arched art glass window. Each level of the smaller, three-stage corner towers is fenestrated with a small art glass window. A small rectangular window is centered on each of the first two stages and the top story features a round window that is called an oculus. Located at the base of the tower is a set of double-leaf entry doors that are recessed behind an arched opening. Projecting from the

wall above the doors is a brick gable that is trimmed with a sheet metal cornice and topped off with a Gothic style crocket finial.

The side elevations facing east and west are similar in character and each is fenestrated with five, tall, regularly placed Gothic arched windows that are glazed with their original art glass. Each window is topped with an ornamental, corbelled brick hood molding. Located between each bay of windows is a brick pilaster topped with beveled, dressed limestone caps. The eaves are liberally embellished with ornamental brick corbelling. The rear elevation facing north is composed of a projecting, apse that is topped with a steeply-pitched, faceted roof. A small, one-story, sacristy or church office projects from the east side of the apse.

Over the years the cream city pressed brick walls of the church have weathered to mottled colors of brown, gray and yellow but the building retains nearly all of its original exterior character. The only significant change to the exterior was the removal of four small sheet metal spires that topped the brick piers surrounding the clock faces. The church tower, incidentally, retains its original weight driven clock which is one of only two clocks of this type known to remain in Milwaukee churches. The other example is located in the tower of another St. John's Lutheran Church at 804 W. Vliet Street.

### **Cemeteries**

The congregation's first cemetery that was begun in 1846 is fanned out on the lawn in front of the church. The cemetery is a fascinating remnant of the county's pioneer days and it is a contributing, historic part of the church complex. It appears that nearly all the grave markers have sunk below the ground. When the present church was constructed in 1896, it limited further expansion of the historic cemetery, so the congregation opened a new one about two hundred seventy feet north of the church on South 68<sup>th</sup> Street. The second cemetery is composed of approximately two acres of level land and burial plots are clustered around a central, elliptically shaped drive. Both cemeteries are fine examples of rural church burial grounds that were started in the nineteenth century. The pioneer cemetery is an inseparable part of the landscape around the church and contributes to the historic character of the building. The second, newer cemetery is not being considered for local designation at this time because it does not directly support the architectural significance of the church building.

### **Other structures on the property**

There are several buildings on the church property that are non-contributing structures, which means they do not presently possess architectural or historic significance that is pivotal to the complex. One of those structures is the parsonage, which is a two-story, hip roofed, American Foursquare style structure located about sixty feet north of the church. Behind the parsonage, at 4021 South 68<sup>th</sup> Street, is a non-contributing, 1-1/2-story brick, Cape Cod style house that was built after World War II. Another non-contributing building is the school, which is located about 200 feet northwest of the church. It is a large, two-story, contemporary style structure that was built in 1942 and then enlarged in 1965 and 1992 with major additions. A contemporary-design, 2-story house is located at the far northwest corner of the property. It is addressed at 3949 South 69<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition there are two, one-story garages on the property. One is located behind the American Foursquare style parsonage and another, a rusticated concrete block structure, is located near the center of the property next to the school's athletic field.

## VII. SIGNIFICANCE

St. John's Lutheran Church is an irreplaceable part of the city's unique and nationally significant collection of churches. It is architecturally and historically significant to the City of Milwaukee as an outstanding example of a German-inspired, tri-tower, Gothic Revival style church and it is one of only three Milwaukee churches made of the rare, pressed variety of Cream City brick.

In terms of the building's significance to the state's architectural history, the Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan, published by the State Historical Society, has identified a need to preserve good examples of ethnic architecture of which St. John's Lutheran Church is a fine example.

The phrase "ethnic architecture" refers to a specific architectural style or feature that is strongly associated with the homeland of an ethnic group. Milwaukee's inventory of ethnic worship structures ranks as one of its most outstanding architectural assets. The preservation of the city's historic ethnic churches, built mainly between about 1855 and 1905, is a priority because genuine examples of ethnic architecture in America are relatively rare.

## VIII. HISTORY

### Architecture

For more than a century the soaring steeple of St. John's Lutheran church has been one of the most prominent architectural features on Milwaukee county's southwest side. In 1996 the church was identified as a top priority for preservation in the City of Milwaukee's report, *City of Steeples*.<sup>3</sup> The cream brick building is a splendid example of "ethnic architecture" which means that its distinctive, three-tower design reflects the homeland of the immigrant community it was built for. The church is also very important to Milwaukee's architectural history because it is one of the last big cream brick churches that was built in the county and one of only three churches in Milwaukee made of premium quality pressed brick.



Detail of corner tower

St. John's eye-catching central steeple is flanked on either side by two towers that are dramatically smaller in size. This arrangement, called a tri-tower design, is uniquely associated with German and German-American architecture of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century in Germany a renewed interest in Gothic architecture brought about a significant wave of church building that, in turn, influenced the design of many churches constructed in America for German-American congregations. Milwaukee's ethnic religious buildings, including tri-tower churches, contribute immensely to city's traditional architectural character and they tell us a great deal about the people who have lived here. Because the number of German ethnic buildings in Milwaukee has dwindled substantially over the years, the remaining structures are quite valuable in terms of their architectural and historic significance to the community.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Jakubovich and Carlen Hatala. *City of Steeples*. Milwaukee: Dept. of City Development, 1996, p. 36.

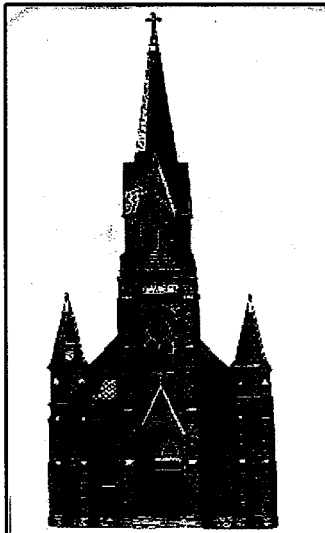
During the nineteenth century, Wisconsin's large German-American population constructed many churches to reflect the architecture of their European homeland, but Tri-tower design churches were relatively rare, partly because of their complexity. A single soaring steeple centered on the main façade easily identifies most of the German ethnic churches.

There are four other tri-tower Lutheran churches in Milwaukee: Zion Lutheran Church (now Bethel Baptist) at 2030 W. North Avenue, Bethlehem Lutheran Church (1888; 1898) at 2454 W. McKinley Avenue, St. Lucas Lutheran Church (1888) at 2605 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood and St. Martini Lutheran Church (1887) located at 1520 South 16th Street. The churches share a tri-tower design, but each has its own unique character and none is a duplicate of the others.

St. John's is one of the few extant buildings on the far southwest side that recalls the history of the area's nineteenth century, German-American farming community. It is also the largest and most significant structure ever built in the hamlet of Root Creek and one of the most important buildings associated with the early history of the Town of Greenfield. The church is located within the City of Milwaukee which annexed the neighborhood from the Town of Greenfield in the early 1950s. Although the church is now surrounded by urban, residential neighborhoods, the building still retains its original architectural character and is a pivotal structure that helps to define Milwaukee as the City of Steeples.

**Cream Brick;**  
**its importance to local architectural history**

The pioneers had their church built with quality materials that would stand the test of time. The exterior walls and tower are made of Milwaukee's unique cream-colored brick which is an inseparable part of the city's history. St. John's is believed to be one of only three extant Milwaukee churches made of high quality, Cream City "pressed" brick which was considerably more expensive than "common" cream brick. In the late nineteenth century, Milwaukee's extensive collection of buildings made from the impressive, golden-colored brick earned the community its "Cream City" nickname.



The tri-tower design of St. John's church. This line drawing was done by Mr. Douglas Quigley for a Church History class at Wisconsin Lutheran High School.

Cream brick has not been manufactured since the 1920s making the remaining structures made of this material an increasingly valuable part of the city's architectural history and its civic pride. The popularity of Milwaukee cream brick was reflected by the fact that as late as the 1920s a large paint manufacturer headquartered in the east, Pittsburgh Paint and Glass, sold ready-mixed house paint in a creamy color called "Milwaukee Brick."

Most of the city's cream brick churches are made of common brick but St. John's is made of the pressed variety, which by comparison has a smoother, sharper appearance. Pressed brick was used when construction budgets would allow for the additional cost and a very fine finished appearance was desired. Today, building restoration specialists find that buildings made of pressed cream brick are often easier to clean than structures made of common brick which is rougher and more porous. The only other large

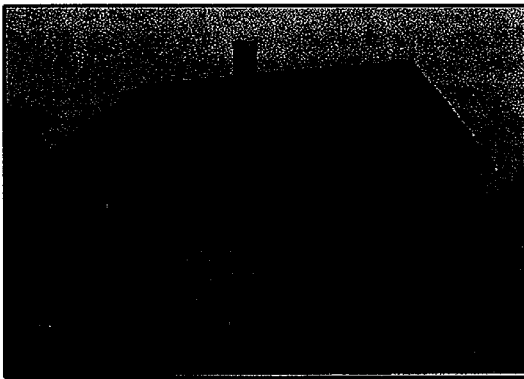
church in Milwaukee made of Cream City pressed brick is All Saints Cathedral (Episcopal) located at 828 E. Juneau Avenue. The third pressed brick church is a relatively small structure, Emanuel Methodist Episcopal (Bethlehem Temple), located at 222 E. Center Street.

Cream brick was used as a primary construction material for many Milwaukee churches between the 1840s and about 1900. Relatively few cream brick churches remain today and St. John's is believed to be the second last large cream brick church built in Milwaukee County. The other later example still standing is St. Elizabeth's Roman Catholic Church (1902) located at 128 W. Burleigh Street.

## HISTORIES OF THE CONGREGATION AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

St. John's congregation has been at the northwest corner of 68<sup>th</sup> and Forest Home since 1846 when its founders bought an acre of land there and established a small cemetery that can still be seen today on the lawn in front of the church. The congregation couldn't afford a church building at first so they met for services in a small cabin owned by Martin Kern. The founders called their congregation the Evangelical Church of the Town of Greenfield and were not officially part of a Lutheran denomination. They changed their name in 1851 to the German Evangelical St. John Church before committing to a new name, St. John's Lutheran, in 1852 and affiliating with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

During the past century, the neighborhood around the church has been transformed from a tiny farming outpost in the Town of Greenfield called Root Creek to a suburban neighborhood that is now part of Milwaukee's far Southwest Side. During the mid-1830s the first settlers began moving into the dense forests that used to cover Greenfield. When the town was formally created on March 8, 1839 it was named Kinnickinnic. Several months later, on December 20, 1839, the township was divided with roughly half of it becoming the Town of Franklin. About two years after that, on February 19, 1841, the remaining lands of Kinnickinnic were renamed the Town of Greenfield by an act of the state legislature.<sup>4</sup>



St. John's first school building—Martin Kern's cabin. It may have been the same house Mr. Kern used for church services in 1846.

The land around the church was originally heavily forested and covered with high quality hardwoods that included hickory, walnut, butternut, ash, poplar, sugar maple, oak, cherry, and sycamore.<sup>5</sup> During the middle of the nineteenth century nearly all of the

trees were cut down to make way for farms and provide lumber for the wooden plank roads which transversed the township.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs of Milwaukee County, Vol. I. Jerome A. Watrous, Ed. Madison, Wisconsin: Western Historical Association, 1909, p. 206

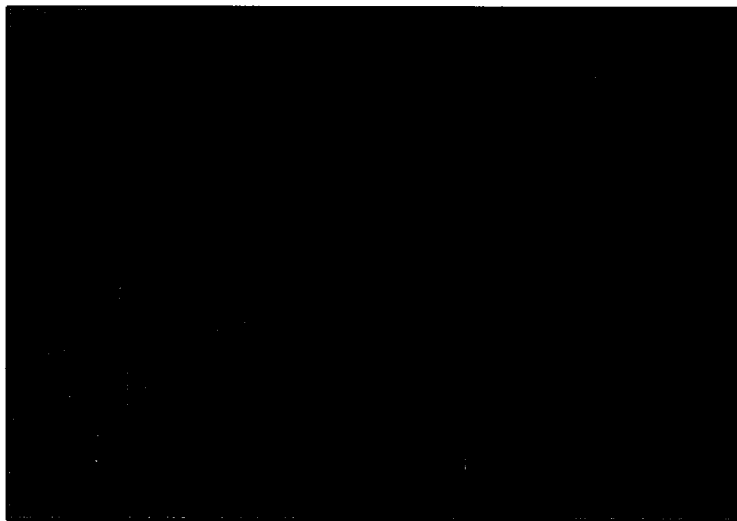
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



The little hamlet of Root Creek that surrounded St. John's church almost became a whistle stop on a railroad that was proposed but never built. As early as 1858 maps indicate that a line of the Milwaukee and Beloit Railroad was planned to run in a southwesterly direction through the Town of Greenfield and pass over what is now the southwest corner of Forest Home Avenue and South 68<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Growth in the church and Root Creek**

The early settlers in the Town of Greenfield were either English-speaking newcomers from older states to the east or immigrants from Germany. It was the German immigrants who founded St. John's and settled onto many of the nearby farms. They began arriving in southeastern Wisconsin by the thousands in the late 1840s after their homeland experienced a revolution and a serious famine that resulted from a blight of the potato crop. One of the first



known German settlers in the Milwaukee area was Wilhelm Strathmann (d. March 16, 1881) who arrived around 1835. He walked up to the Milwaukee area from Chicago and was so impressed with what he saw that he settled permanently in the Town of Greenfield on a government grant.<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin was a particularly attractive destination for German immigrants partly because the state made land available at reasonable prices, it had a favorable constitution, and its immigration commissioners were German.<sup>7</sup>

St. John's first permanent church (razed ca. 1942) constructed between 1850-52. Beginning in 1896 the building was used as the congregation's school.

At least two churches were organized in Greenfield before St. John's. The first was a Baptist

congregation that was founded in 1841 and the second, a Methodist Episcopal Church, was organized a year later in April, 1842. St. John's was organized in 1846 and their location on the bustling Janesville Plank Road was an excellent spot for growth and visibility in the surrounding farm community.

St. John's was founded as a German-speaking protestant congregation and at first it did not have specific ties to a Lutheran denomination. That changed in 1852 when the church hired a part-time Lutheran pastor, Reverend Johannes Muelhauser, who served Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee at the northwest corner of N. Broadway and E. Juneau Avenue.

Rev. Muehlhauser was instrumental in starting the Synod of Wisconsin in 1849 which is now called the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). He persuaded St. John's members

<sup>6</sup>Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>James Paul Allen and Eugene James Turner. *We The People. An Atlas of America's Ethnic Diversity*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988, p. 51.

to reorganize as a Lutheran Congregation and join the new synod. The congregation then changed its name to St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church of Root Creek, and shortly after that their first permanent church was completed and dedicated on November 7, 1852.

The congregation began a grade school in 1856. A year later in 1857 a full-time teacher, Mr. Louis Nietmann, was hired for the salary of \$5.00 per month and the parents of his pupils paid for his room and board. The next year a member of the congregation donated a small old cabin that became the congregation's first permanent school. Prior to that classes were held in the church.

The congregation grew steadily during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many of the parishioners were farmers from the surrounding town of Greenfield. The area around the church, which was the tiny hamlet of Root Creek, became a modest commercial node with a few stores that catered to the day-to-day needs of the surrounding farm community.



Line drawing of the church in the newspaper, *Germania*, April 22, 1896, page 1.

By the early 1890s the congregation outgrew their modest, 1850s wooden church building. They chose to build a new brick church according to the designs of Milwaukee architects Herman Paul Schnetzky and Eugene R. Liebert who specialized in ethnic religious buildings and related structures. Construction of the church was front-page news in Milwaukee's *Germania* newspaper, a German language daily. The report stated that St. John's had a seating capacity of 500 and measured 110 feet in length and 42 feet in width. Dedication of the church took place on November 1, 1896 and the old wooden church was remodeled into a schoolhouse and used until 1942 when it was replaced with a new building. Another big development for the congregation in 1896 was their purchase of an additional two acres north of the present church building for a new cemetery that is still there today.

One of the first remodeling projects on the church took place in 1921 when electric lights were installed.<sup>8</sup> It really had no significant impact on the architecture of the building, but it was symbolic of changes that were occurring around the church and in America. At about the same time a clock was installed in the church tower that is still in use today. It is one of the few weight-powered tower clocks remaining in Milwaukee. Most of the city's other original tower clocks have been completely replaced with modern movements powered by electric motors. The architect's original drawing that appeared in the *Germania* Newspaper in 1896 depicts a clock in the tower but it apparently was too costly to install it at that time.

The interior of the church has remained substantially intact over the years although the original wooden altar and pews were replaced after World War II with contemporary design furnishings that reflect the architectural tastes of the time period. One of the significant post-World War II changes to the interior was recently reversed. A pair of Victorian-era stained glass windows flanking the altar that had been plastered over in 1956 were uncovered and restored in 1995.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary book, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The oldest part of the present school was built in 1942 and enlarged with major additions that were constructed in 1965 and 1992. During the 1990s the congregation again expanded its site by purchasing the neighboring Pee Wee's Tavern and land around it just west of the church on Forest Home Avenue. The tavern, an old circa 1900 structure, was razed and part of the lot is now used for surface parking. The tavern is believed to be the site of the old Root Creek post office.<sup>10</sup> Root Creek completely vanished when St. John's church property and surrounding neighborhood were annexed by the City of Milwaukee in the early 1950s.

The congregation has grown in recent years and the members have done a fine job of maintaining their splendid church building. The soaring steeple of the century-old structure remains one of the best-known visual markers on Milwaukee's far southwest side and at night the building has a particularly dramatic, eye-catching character when it is aglow with architectural floodlights.

### **The Janesville Plank Road**

West Forest Home Avenue is one of the southwest side's major thoroughfares and in the nineteenth century the street was called the Janesville Plank Road because it was paved with thick hardwood planks that came from the dense, old growth forests that used to cover the area. The cemetery in front of St. John's church, incidentally, is one of the few features that survives from the days of the historic plank road.

Plank roads were the freeways of their day and offered the best and most reliable routes for inter-city wagon travel in southeastern Wisconsin during the middle of the nineteenth century. The wooden roads were built throughout the northeastern part of the country as settlers moved westward and cleared the forests in their path. Plank roads in southeastern Wisconsin tended to last longer than their counterparts in other states because they were made from hardwood rather than softwood trees.

The Janesville Plank Road, as its name implies, was the principal route between Milwaukee and Janesville during the middle of the nineteenth century. Travelers usually paid a toll to use the road that was maintained and operated by private investors. Plank roads, however, were costly and difficult to maintain because they rotted away in a relatively short period of time and the steady pounding of wagon wheels tore the planks apart. Wooden paving materials were used throughout the nineteenth century, but the heyday of plank road building was over by the late 1850s because they couldn't compete with the newly-constructed railroads that offered a more reliable, quicker, and cheaper means of inter-city transportation. In 1872 the Janesville Plank Road was renamed Forest Home Avenue after the cemetery that had been established in 1850 at the present day corner of West Forest Home and West Lincoln Avenues.<sup>11</sup> As late as 1876, however, a toll booth was located at the present day intersection of Forest Home and W. Howard Avenues.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Illustrated Historical Atlas of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. Chicago: H. Belden and Company, 1876, p. 39, Map of Greenfield Township.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Baehr, Milwaukee Streets: The Stories Behind Their Names. Milwaukee: Cream City Press, 1995, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Illustrated Historical Atlas of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. Chicago: H Belden & Company, 1876, p. 39 Map of Greenfield Township.

## Architects

### Schnetzky and Liebert

The architectural firm of Herman Paul Schnetzky and Eugene R. Liebert worked extensively for the Milwaukee area's German American community during the early 1890s. One of their specialties was the design of large, German style churches with soaring steeples. The senior member of the firm, **Herman Paul Schnetzky** (1850-1916), was one of Milwaukee's most distinguished Victorian-era architects. He began his career in Milwaukee with the prestigious architectural firm of H. C. Koch and Co. and later left to start his own practice with Eugene Liebert. After his partnership with Mr. Liebert dissolved in the late 1890s, Mr. Schnetzky built a successful independent practice that later included his son, Hugo, as a partner.

Mr. Schnetzky was born in Wriezen, Germany and came to Milwaukee in 1868 when the young city was nicknamed the "Deutsche Athen" (the German Athens, in English) because of its reputation as an unusually vibrant center of German culture and immigration in North America. The extent of Mr. Schnetzky's education in Germany is not known. The 1869 Milwaukee City Directory listed him as a draftsman for the architects George Mygatt and H.C. Koch. Mr. Mygatt was one of Milwaukee's first architects, but his direct influence on Mr. Schnetzky was probably minimal because the firm dissolved in 1870. H.C. Koch, who had been an apprentice to Mygatt before becoming a partner, entered into a partnership with Julius Hess in 1870 and probably hired Mr. Schnetzky as a draftsman.

Mr. Schnetzky's name disappeared from city directories for a three-year period between 1871 and 1873. He might have left the city for architectural training or work elsewhere, but in 1874 he reappeared in the city directories as a local resident working as an assistant architect for H.C. Koch. Julius Hess had dissolved his partnership with Mr. Koch during Mr. Schnetzky's absence. H.C. Koch subsequently became the proprietor of one of the city's most prestigious architectural offices that ranked as one of the three largest Milwaukee architectural firms in the late nineteenth century. The firm designed many of the city's public schools during the 1870s and early 1880s, and Mr. Schnetzky was undoubtedly involved in their design and construction.

In 1884 Koch and Co. hired **Eugene R. Liebert**, an 18-year-old German immigrant draftsman who had arrived in Milwaukee a year earlier from Germany.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Liebert worked and trained in the Koch and Co. office until 1887 when Mr. Schnetzky started his own architectural firm and hired Mr. Liebert as his draftsman and foreman. Examples of Mr. Schnetzky's work from this period includes St. Martini Lutheran Church (1887), 1520 S. 16<sup>th</sup> St., the McGeoch Building (1890) 322 E. Michigan Street, St. John's Lutheran Church (1889) 804 W. Vliet St. and the Blatz Brewing Company Office Building (1890) at 1120 N. Broadway.

Mr. Schnetzky and Mr. Liebert formed a partnership in 1892 and some of their collaborative design work includes St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church (1892) 1553 N. 24<sup>th</sup> St. and the Germania Building (1896) 135 W. Wells Street. The partnership dissolved in 1897 and subsequently the two men set up their own practices. Around 1900 Mr. Schnetzky became one of the pioneers in reinforced concrete construction techniques in Milwaukee. After 1909 Mr. Schnetzky went into partnership with his son, Hugo, and together they designed several

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory, Vol. IV, p.709.

commercial buildings in downtown Milwaukee including the large Manufacturer's Home Building (1909) at 104 E. Mason Street. Mr. Schnetzky died in 1916.

**Hugo W. Schnetzky** was born in Milwaukee on November 17, 1882. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1907 and later studied architecture at Columbia University in New York. After returning to Milwaukee he again practiced architecture with his father between 1913 and 1916. After his father died in 1916, Hugo continued the practice alone until May, 1920 when he was elected president and general manager of the Wisconsin Motor Manufacturing Co. which made automobile, truck, tractor and marine motors. He then reportedly "consolidated" his architectural firm with the Henry Horst Co. of Rock Island, Illinois. It is not yet known to what extent Hugo participated in the firm or if at some point in his career he returned to full-time architectural work.<sup>14</sup>

Mr. Schnetzky's partner, **Eugene R. Liebert** (1866-1945), was one of the city's best-known German-born architects. Much of his residential, commercial, industrial and institutional design work still exists today and it contributes significantly to the architectural character of the city. Mr. Liebert's career spanned more than six decades and during that time he worked for two prominent architectural firms before setting up his own practice which he later operated with his sons Walter F. and Carl.

Mr. Liebert arrived in Milwaukee in 1883 from Germany and went to work for the Trostel and Gallun tannery. A year later in 1884 he changed jobs to work as a draftsman for the prestigious Milwaukee architectural firm of H.C. Koch and Co. During his years with Koch and Co., Mr. Liebert met and worked with Mr. Schnetzky and in 1887 the two men left the firm to begin their own architectural business which offered complete, turn-key services to their clients. Initially, Mr. Liebert was employed by Mr. Schnetzky's as a job foreman between 1887-1888 and then moved on to work as a draftsman from 1889 to 1890. Examples of the firm's work from this period includes St. Martini Lutheran Church (1887), 1520 S. 16<sup>th</sup> St., the McGeoch Building (1890) 322 E. Michigan Street, St. John's Lutheran Church (1889) 804 W. Vliet St. and the Blatz Brewing Company Office Building (1890) at 1120 N. Broadway.

Mr. Schnetzky and Mr. Liebert formed a partnership in 1892 and some of their collaborative design work includes St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church (1892) 1553 N. 24<sup>th</sup> St. and the Germania Building (1896) 135 W. Wells Street. The partnership dissolved in 1897 and subsequently the two men set up their own independent practices.

During his years in independent practice, Mr. Liebert designed the incomparable Harnischfeger house (1905) at 3424 W. Wisconsin Avenue that is now recognized as a veritable American icon of German-influenced residential design from that period. In 1927 Mr. Liebert designed another fine residence for the Harnischfeger family at 2635 N. Terrace Avenue. Mr. Liebert lived for most of his life in a Queen Anne style house he built in 1887 at 1948 N. Holton Street. It is one of the few nineteenth century architects' houses still standing today in the city.

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<sup>14</sup>History of Milwaukee, City and County. Vol. III. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co. 1922, pp. 241-242.

## IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that St. John's Lutheran Church, the pioneer cemetery in front of it and a narrow band of land around them be considered for designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic District as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-4, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances. Other structures on the property are excluded.

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

*Rationale:* Criterion **e-4** is applied because the design of the church recalls some of the architectural traditions of Germany and the ethnicity of the congregation's founders.

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

*Rationale:* Criterion **e-5** is applied because the church is an outstanding example of German-influenced, Victorian Gothic revival design.

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

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

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

*Rationale:* Criterion **e-9** is applied because the church is one of the most outstanding structures on the city's far southwest side and the most prominent structure ever built in the hamlet of Root Creek.

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Drawing of St. John's Lutheran Church by Douglas Quigley (courtesy of Mr. Quigley)

Germania. Newspaper article, April 22, 1896, p. 1.

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90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church at S. 68<sup>th</sup> and W. Forest Home Avenue, 1936.

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary book published by the church, 1996.



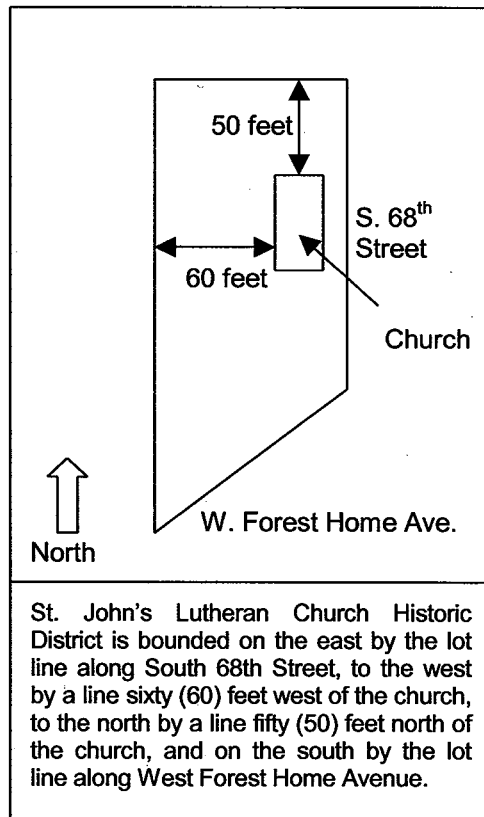


## X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES FOR ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

### *Preface*

The area of St. John's church property subject to preservation guidelines is limited to the 1896 church building, the historic pioneer cemetery in front of it, and a band of land surrounding them. The guidelines do not apply to any structures or landscape features,

either existing or new, which are located outside the bounds of the district. The guidelines are primarily intended to preserve the exterior of the church building that has changed very little in more than 100 years. Retention of the pioneer cemetery in front of the church is strongly encouraged, but no review of the Historic Preservation Commission would be required for new burials in the cemetery or the installation of new or replacement grave markers.



The guidelines are not intended to prevent or inhibit ordinary maintenance of the building. Proper maintenance techniques are encouraged through the guidelines, but it is not a requirement to restore any architectural features that were missing before designation. However, in the event missing features are voluntarily replaced they generally have to match the originals as closely as possible.

The preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. The Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions.

### A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch.

### B. Materials

#### 1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered with substitute siding because doing so could cause irreversible damage to the masonry and drastically alter the appearance of the building.
- b. Repoint defective or deteriorated mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. See the masonry chapters in the books, *As Good*

*As New or Good for Business* for explanations on why the use of a proper mortar mix is crucial to making lasting repairs that will not contribute to new deterioration of the masonry. Replaced mortar joints should be tooled to match the style of the original joints.

- c. Clean masonry only when necessary and with the gentlest methods possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive blasting to brick or stone surfaces is not allowed because these procedures erode the surface of the material, accelerate deterioration and increase the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. When cleaning limestone and terra cotta, avoid the indiscriminate use of acid-based cleaning solutions that could irreversibly erode these materials.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new materials that duplicate the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

## **2. Wood/Metal**

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. The central steeple, two smaller side towers and the cupola on the ridge of the roof are essential features of the church and should be retained.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with modern materials that are incompatible with the historic character of the building. Existing aluminum trim does not need to be removed. The installation of vinyl trim or siding is not allowed.

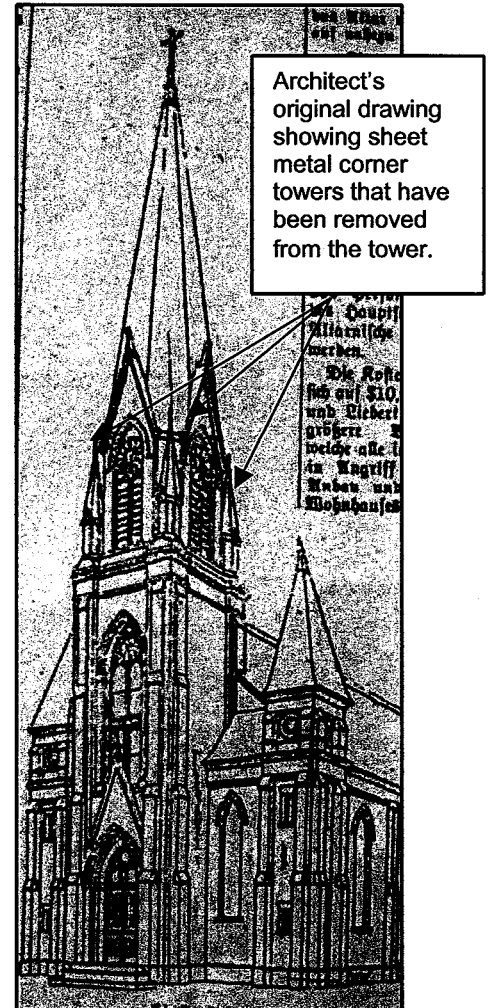
## **C. Windows and Doors**

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

#### D. Trim and Ornamentation

Existing trim or ornamentation should not be changed except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance, but not necessarily in material. Removal of existing aluminum trim is not required but the installation of additional aluminum trim is generally discouraged.

Replacement or restoration of documented, original trim that is now missing is not required. In the event that the four missing sheet metal corner tower that flanked the clock faces are replaced they should match the original design as closely as possible.



#### E. Additions

Additions are permitted with the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. The commission will review only additions or parts thereof that are located within the designated district that surrounds the church and the pioneer cemetery. Design review is limited to the area within 50 feet north of the church 60 feet west of it, and from the front of the church to the Forest Home Avenue lot line and from the east side of the church to the South 68<sup>th</sup> Street lot line.

Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the church building. The commission will review the compatibility of the addition with the historic church building and may consider the following details: Window size and placement, scale, design, materials, roof configuration, height and the degree to which the addition impacts the principal elevation(s) of the church. Also, any new construction should respect and preserve the pioneer cemetery in front of the church.

#### F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign requires the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the architectural character of the building. Translucent plastic signboards that are illuminated from behind and mounted in a metal box will generally not be approved.

## **G. Landscape features/Cemetery**

The pioneer cemetery in front of the church should be retained. It is not necessary for the Historic Preservation Commission to approve or review routine operation and maintenance of the cemetery such as new burials or the installation of new or replacement grave markers. New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures would be reviewed however, and these features should respect and enhance the character of the church building and the cemetery. It is strongly encouraged that any historic grave markers, if they exist, be retained.

## **H. Guidelines for New Construction**

It is important that any new, separate construction within the district be designed in a manner that respects the historic character of the church.

### **1. Site**

New construction must respect the historic site of the church. The pioneer cemetery should not be disturbed, or, if absolutely necessary, as little as possible. New construction should be designed and built in a manner that maintains the appearance of the church as free-standing structure.

### **2. Scale**

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the church.

### **3. Form**

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

### **4. Materials**

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

## **I. Guidelines for Demolition**

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there are instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation

Commission. The Commission shall take the following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, into consideration when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

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

2. Importance

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

3. Location

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

4. Potential for Restoration

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

5. Additions

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