

April 7, 2013

Matthew Jarosz, Chair, and Members of the
Historic Preservation Commission
City of Milwaukee
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mr. Jarosz and Members of the Commission:

I'm writing today to encourage you to approve the nomination for historic site designation of the remaining three buildings associated with the New Bavaria Brewery, aka the Franz Falk Brewing Company. In spite of their long period of neglect, these buildings still represent an important part of Milwaukee's extraordinary brewing history. That fact makes them worth protecting from further decline, especially until explorations of their potential adaptive reuse have time to develop. One of the three already has a likely reuse, while the others are more tentative at the moment. Yet there is reason for hope that all three can be brought back to useful life, while also preserving and celebrating aspects of the city's brewing history. That hope now lies in your Commission's hands.

My own interest in this issue derives from my many years of work on the architectural history of Midwestern breweries. Milwaukee is one of four cities (with Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago) that form the cornerstones of my investigation into how breweries developed distinctive architectural forms between the early 19th century and the onset of national Prohibition in 1920. Over that time, breweries passed through several evolutionary stages, from simple vernacular buildings much like other factories, to more and more elaborate complexes of special-purpose buildings that served particular parts of the brewing process. By the later 1880s and 90s, brewing had achieved a real Golden Age, which is easily seen in the architecture that pays tribute to those firms successful enough to expand and grow. It's hardly news to say that, even early on, Milwaukee was notable for its concentration of brewing firms that reached out across the nation with ever-growing distribution systems. Franz Falk and his various partners and successors played significant roles in creating an architecture that made that impact possible.

When Franz Falk moved to the Menomonee Valley site, he began constructing a brewery that was representative of a new approach to designing breweries. The distinctive Romanesque style and the more horizontal than vertical organization of brewery components, seen in early illustrations, related directly to a new spirit of pride among German-born brewers that emerged in the late 1860s and 70s. The introduction of German-style lager beer had now begun to displace English-style ales. Initially, lager's popularity was rooted among the vast numbers of German immigrants in cities like Milwaukee, but by the 1870s, a taste for it had spread far beyond into American culture at large. To serve expanding markets, brewers like Falk required larger buildings, and they used a more ornamental style as a sign of changes in the industry.

Further, they needed new means of keeping more and more lager properly cool as it aged. Already in the 1870s, Falk's Bavaria Brewery featured a significant number of above-ground ice houses, an intermediate step between underground lagering vaults and mechanically cooled "refrigerators" or stock houses. The Ice House/Refrigerator/Malt House being nominated appears to represent that latter transition. Although historical details are still somewhat murky, that building is likely to have developed in stages itself, perhaps from as early as 1870, as a date block indicates. As it grew, it also likely saw the

changeover from cooling with actual ice to cooling with mechanical refrigeration equipment that piped cold brine through the building to keep its interior temperature close to freezing. And its large size by the late 1880s, in comparison with the rest of the brewery, signifies the extensive amount of space now needed to store growing quantities of Falk's beer. The large scale and the solidity of the building's construction likewise speak to widespread commonalities in Midwestern brewery architecture of the later 1880s and 90s.

The former stable is similarly expressive of the expansion of Falk's brewery. It became a large and handsome building, again more ornately designed than would have been true at, say, mid-century. The scale suggests a large contingent of horses and wagons to distribute Falk's beers locally, another expression of Falk's success. The round-headed arches and oculi that give the stable a special flair also tie it into the evolving Romanesque-based style commonly used in brewery architecture.

In contrast to the two buildings mentioned above, the small office is of a quite different scale and style. Its Neoclassical features make it a remarkably delicate and decorative element among much larger and heavier structures. Its retention of much of its interior, as well as its exterior character is highly unusual and, thus, significant. Along with the others, this building helps reflect the architectural variety of the Falk Brewery over time, and it too is worthy of consideration for preservation and reuse.

Milwaukee is still a treasure trove of fine brewery architecture, but too much has been and continues to be lost. This is especially distressing, given the fact that the city's close ties with the brewing industry still ring in American ears nationwide. You have the chance to help preserve an almost forgotten group of buildings associated with an important 19th-century Milwaukee brewing firm. Your support, along with that of the City's Department of Neighborhood Services and the UWM School of Architecture, can result in the owners finding effective ways to redevelop, not destroy these structures. The former Falk site is historically important, and I urge you to vote in favor of its designation as such. That action is not only appropriate in and of itself, but it will also help protect structures long left languishing until they can be revived for a useful future.

Thank you for your consideration of this plea.

Sincerely,



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