



## Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

**HPC meeting date: 11/15/2010**  
**Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4**  
**Staff reviewer: Paul Jakubovich**  
**PTS #69442**

<b>Property</b>	327 E. WISCONSIN AVE. and addresses on Milwaukee Street around the corner	
<b>Owner/Applicant</b>	MBI PROPERTIES LLC 111 E WISCONSIN AV, STE 1710 MILWAUKEE WI 53202	Douglas P Nyssen Kahler Slater, Inc. 111 W. Wisconsin Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53203 Phone: (414) 290-3794 Fax: (414) 272-2001
<b>Proposal</b>	Demolish five buildings, (319-325 E. Wisconsin Avenue, 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, 625 N. Milwaukee, 627 N. Milwaukee, 629-631 N. Milwaukee, 633 N. Milwaukee) in the East Side Commercial historic district. Construct new hotel complex.	

## Staff comments

The proposal calls for the demolition of five contributing buildings in the East Side Commercial historic district in order to make way for a new hotel complex. This is the last intact late nineteenth and early 20th century block of commercial buildings in downtown Milwaukee. Recognizing the historic significance of this block and two others adjoining it, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior placed the buildings, in their present condition, on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The criteria for listing on the national register are particularly demanding and the designation had to pass reviews at the local, state and federal levels of government. The City of Milwaukee placed the buildings on the local register, protecting them from demolition, in 1991. Since the designations, permit records indicate that little or no changes have been made to the exteriors of the buildings.

Many historic buildings surrounding the block in question have been successfully restored and put to new uses for the benefit of the people who live in and visit Milwaukee. Several buildings just north of the proposed project in the 700 block of N. Milwaukee Street are pre-Civil War, making them older than the buildings being proposed for demolition and yet they have been successfully renovated. The Third Ward historic district to the south is a vibrant center of activity today in large part because of the many old buildings that have been creatively and sensitively rehabilitated. The same success can be brought to the East Side Commercial historic district.

The demolition of the buildings would have a negative impact on the remaining historic buildings in the district. One of the gems on the block is the McGeoch building at the northwest corner of Milwaukee and Michigan which has been sensitively restored by its owner, architect David Uihlein. He has gone to great lengths to rejuvenate his building and opposes the neighboring project in its present form.

None of the buildings have been so altered that they cannot be restored. In fact, with the use of proper restoration techniques the buildings could be the nucleus of a rejuvenated downtown Milwaukee. Of the buildings on the Milwaukee street façade approximately 90 percent of the upper stories remain in their original condition. On the Wisconsin Avenue side, the changes that have occurred, exclusive of the street level storefront, occurred so long ago that they too, have acquired their own historic character.

The five buildings that are proposed for removal do not meet any of the seven criteria for demolition that are listed in the city's preservation ordinance. HPC staff has looked closely at each of the criterion and has the following response.

Criterion h-1: Removing these buildings would irreparably damage the last remaining historic district and assemblage of buildings of its kind in the City of Milwaukee.

Criterion h-2: As a group, the buildings represent a veritable catalog of architectural styles and building materials.

Criterion h-3: Demolishing the buildings would be contrary to the objectives of both the historic preservation plan for the district and the city's recently adopted Downtown Plan which specifically states that "Locally designated contributing historic buildings should be retained and redeveloped in accordance with local preservation requirements." A photograph of 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, one of the buildings being proposed for demolition, appears in the Downtown Plan book as an example of the buildings that should be restored and redeveloped.

Criterion h-4: The buildings could not be easily reproduced today. Even the proportions of the buildings and the system used to generate it are not in common use today.

Criterion h-5: As a group, the buildings represent a unique snapshot of Milwaukee in the years prior to world War II.

Criterion h-6: the buildings are not deteriorated beyond repair. The downtown bookstore at 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, for example, supports the weight of at least

today.

Criterion h-5: As a group, the buildings represent a unique snapshot of Milwaukee in the years prior to World War II. They show the development of the city.

Criterion h-6: the buildings are not deteriorated beyond repair. The downtown bookstore at 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue supports the weight of at least three floors of books.

Criterion h-7: the proposed new structure is not compatible with the surrounding buildings in terms of scale and character of the district.

In summary, HPC staff recommends against demolition and in favor of restoration and rehabilitation of the existing structures.

Following is a list of the buildings threatened with demolition and a brief history of each, if available.

## **611- 625 N. Milwaukee Street PIONEER BUILDING (1864-65/1925)**

Record of COAs

02/27/1998—Compressor at alley elevation

05/19/1998—New awnings

11/20/2000—Rehabilitate front entrance, remove black marble veneer at entrance  
(625)(never completed)

03/12/1996—Signage

03/15/1996—Signage

NR Listing 09/23/1986

Contributing

Local designation 11/18/1991

City Assessed Value \$2,255,000 Tax Delinquent



## **History**

The Milwaukee Musical Society was established in 1850. After its performance space, Albany Hall, was destroyed by fire on March 1, 1862, they embarked on a subscription drive to build a better auditorium. The Musical Society Hall (also known as the Academy of Music) was built at today's 625 N. Milwaukee Street for \$60,000 and opened on January 29, 1865. Local architect Edward Townsend Mix designed the building based on plans initially drawn by a New York architect named Peterson. It was the first theater in Milwaukee to have an auditorium on the ground floor and was one of the few in the country used solely for performances and not other commercial activities. The building was sold to private interests and featured vaudeville acts, some legitimate theater and even motion pictures. Over time changes were made to the façade. It was last known as the Schubert Theater.

In 1925-1926, the building's owner, McGeoch Building Company, took out permits to remove the auditorium interior and construct a new façade at a total cost of \$75,000. New fireproof floors were installed at this time and the building featured storefronts on the ground level and offices above. The building was called the Pioneer Building since that time.

Early tenants in the Pioneer Building included a jewelry store, dress shop, wholesale milliner (Blumenfeld-Locher Company), and offices for real estate brokers, lawyers and insurance agents and the fourth floor had The Jewish Chronicle newspaper. The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle was founded in 1921 and was Milwaukee's first English language Jewish newspaper. It is still in publication.

Restaurants have occupied space on the ground floor including the Colony Inn (1930s), the Swashbuckler (1960s), Pier 611 Steak House (1960s) Gutho's Triple Crown (1970s).

The Woman's Exchange was an important tenant. Established in 1882, the Exchange was a consignment center where genteel ladies in straightened circumstances or women otherwise confined to the home were able to sell handmade goods upon payment of an annual membership fee. The consignment center received ten percent of the sale of the items sold. The goal was the creation and preservation of women's independence and the maintaining of self respect for those who might otherwise have to rely on charitable assistance. Very progressive in its outlook, the Exchange stressed the monetary and economic value of a woman's time and efforts and emphasized that home crafted products were of a value on par with men's occupations. The Exchange soon branched out to run a restaurant and sponsor classes. The restaurant moved to 611 N. Milwaukee Street in 1936 taking over the former Colony Inn. The corporation disbanded in 1965 and the store and restaurant closed on September 1<sup>st</sup> that year.

Other tenants over time on the ground floor have included a gift shop, Sanctum Regnum (1970s), Easter Seal Society Store (1980s), the Hand of Glory (1990s) and the House of Magic (1990s). Upper floors have included Swanson Productions, a beauty salon, Kromer Cap Company, and printing companies among other offices.

Alterations to the Pioneer Building have been minimal over time. The front windows of 611 were in-filled with brick in late 1966 to accommodate a new restaurant that was moving into the former Woman's Exchange space. The main entrance to the building lobby was remodeled in 1961.

## **Ownership Records 625 N. Milwaukee (Musical Society Hall/Pioneer building)**

1985 September 1—Investment Properties, Ltd c/o Cons. Capital Income Trust,  
Attn: Lauri Foster/John W. Harragan (1203) / 2000 Powell St., Emeryville, CA 94608

1988 May 4 —Sheriff Sale to Consolidated Cap Income Trust

1992 April 16—National Income Realty Trust sells to Robert E John

2000 August 10—Robert E John sells to Switch & Data WI One LLC

2006 February 14—Switch & Data WI One LLC/c/o Levin Properties Inc. to Frank  
J. Andrews Milwaukee NOWI LLC

2009 January 26—Frank J Andrews Milwaukee NOWI LLC c/o Bruce W. Layne to Milwaukee NOWI LLC (registered effective 02/14/2006, Registered Agent: Jill Domecki, 7722 W. Greenfield Avenue, West Allis, 53214; Principal Office 425 S. Lapham Street, Oconomowoc, WI 53066

**627/629-631 N Milwaukee Street Diefendorf's Building (1867)**

(627 was access to upper floor, 629 to the Italianate building, 631 to the building with the altered façade per building inspector's notes)

Record of COAs

03/06/2008—Signage (631)

05/07/1991—Signage (631)

NR Listing 09/23/1986

627—Contributing

631—Non Contributing

Local Historic Designation 11/18/1991

627 Current City Assessed Value \$194,000 Taxes Paid in Full

Occupants

1868-1869—Music Hall Billiard Room (both store fronts)

Jonathan Arnold, Lawyer upper floor (No. 631)

Mrs. Mary B. Wood, Cloak maker (No. 631)

1869-1876—William A. Munn tin shop

1872-1874—Christian Statesman, newspaper

1874-1875—Mrs. Lucinda Jones, Dressmaker (No. 631)

James Johnson, Physician and health offices (No. 631)

1930—shop that sold gifts, confectionery and floral goods

Shop that sold children's clothing

1934—J. P. Erwin Niedringhaus Antique Silver

1935—Furrier

1937---Emma Lange Smartwear

1977—Wall Galleries retail sales and auction of antiques and household furniture

1971—Haessler Hardware Company

1991—Barsamian Oriental Rugs



629 N. Milwaukee



631 N. Milwaukee

## History

Dr. E. L. Diefendorf had his house and office at this site prior to the fire of October 22, 1865. His insurance was said to have covered his losses. On July 11, 1867 the Milwaukee Sentinel reported that his building, which adjoined the Music Hall, was not making progress but would be completed by the end of the summer. Dr. Diefendorf (also spelled Diefenderfer) died soon after on January 11, 1868.

Alterations have occurred to the storefront at 629 N. Milwaukee but the remainder of the building is essentially intact. Some alterations occurred in 1930. The front of 631 N. Milwaukee was completely rebuilt. This appears to have been done in 1937 when the Emma Lange Smartwear shop was a tenant. This building was connected at the rear with the storefront on Wisconsin Avenue also occupied by Emma Lange. They formed an L-shaped store.

## Ownership Records 627 N. Milwaukee Street ( historically 629, Diefendorf Building)

1980 February 1—Robert A. Levine and Howard D. Spector, 312 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202

1994 August 19—Robert A. Levine to Howard D. Spector

1997 June 5—Caryl G. Spector to Howard D. Spector

2006 June 21—Howard D. Spector to Marshall Block Inc (registered November 5, 1965, Registered Agent: Robert A. Levine 111 E. Wisconsin Avenue Suite 1710, Milwaukee, WI 53202; Delinquent October 1, 2008, Administrative Dissolution October 11, 2010)

2007 January 23—Marshall Block Inc to MBI Properties LLC (registered September 28, 2006, Registered Agent Robert a. Levine, 111 E. Wisconsin Avenue Suite 1710, Milwaukee, WI 53202)

### **Ownership Records 629-631 N. Milwaukee Street (part of Diefendorf's Building)**

1980 February 1—Robert A. Levine and Howard D. Spector

1994 August 19—Robert A. Levine to Howard D. Spector

2006 June 21—Howard D. Spector to Marshall Block Inc. MBI Properties LLC see above



## **633 N Milwaukee Street Historic Name Unknown (c.1870)**

Record of COAs  
None

NR Listing 09/23/1986  
Contributing

Local Historic Designation 11/18/1991

Occupants



## **Ownership Records 633 N. Milwaukee Street**

Now part of tax key for 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue. This property is shown as connected to the Wisconsin Avenue storefront as early as the 1876 Rascher Fire Insurance Map.

### **319-323 E Wisconsin Follansbee Block (1867)**

Record of COAs

09/05/2007—Replace molding and two windows at 2<sup>nd</sup> story bay (No. 327)

NR Listing 09/23/1986

Local historic Designation 11/19/1991

Current City Assessed Value \$740, 000 Taxes Paid in Full



For History see below

### **Ownership Records 319-323 E. Wisconsin Avenue**

1980 February 1—Robert A. Levine and Howard D. Spector

1994 August 19—Robert A. Levine to Howard D. Spector

1997 June 5—Caryl G. Spector to Howard D. Spector

2006 June 21--Howard D Spector to Marshall Block Inc

2007 January 23—Marshall Block Inc to MBI Properties LLC

**327 E Wisconsin Follansbee Block portion owned by Samuel A Field**  
**Building 1867**

Record of COAs  
None

NR Listing 09/23/1986

Local Historic Designation 11/18/1991

Current City Assessed Value \$441,000 Taxes Paid in Full



## **History**

The building addressed today at 319-331 (327) East Wisconsin Avenue was historically known as the Follansbee Block after its builder, Alanson Follansbee. Follansbee was a native of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, who apprenticed in the bakery business in Boston before relocating to the Midwest. After a few years in Chicago and in Galena, Illinois, Follansbee moved to Milwaukee in 1847 and opened the Wisconsin Street Bakery which grew into one of the largest in the area. It was located at 42-44 Wisconsin (old number) on the north side of E. Wisconsin Avenue. In 1865 he formed a partnership with Augustus T. Riddell as A. Follansbee & Company, and they opened a steam bakery in the 800 block on North Broadway. A small bakery was also located at 117 Wisconsin (old number) in 1865 and was associated with Lansing Follansbee, possibly a son or some relative or a misspelling of Alanson's name.

The Follansbee's invested in real estate in addition to their business and owned property, including a tenement and barns as well as 117 Wisconsin on the block bounded by E. Wisconsin, E. Michigan, N. Broadway, and N. Milwaukee Streets.

On the evening of Sunday, October 25, 1865, an arsonist set fire to the Follansbee barn, and the resulting blaze destroyed most of the block, which has consisted chiefly of frame dwellings and stores, many of which dated back to the earliest settlement of the city. The brand new music hall (today's Pioneer Building), which was a masonry building, was spared. About a dozen families were said to have been left homeless after the fire including an African American family who had occupied Follansbee's tenement building.

Fortunately, Follansbee's main business located two blocks north was unharmed. By January 5, 1866 he had made the decision to construct a new commercial building on his Wisconsin Avenue frontage and relocate the bakery outlet to West Wisconsin Avenue between Second and Third Streets. In July, 1867 the newspapers reported that Follansbee would shortly begin work on the new \$30,000 commercial building at the southwest corner of Milwaukee Street and Wisconsin Avenue and that it would be "nearly uniform" in appearance with the structure that J.A. Noonan was building at the west end of the block. On August 3, 1867 Follansbee sold the east 60 feet of his frontage to John Francis Birchard, probably to help finance the project. Birchard, in turn, sold the west 26 feet of his parcel to real estate dealer Samuel S. Field on August 28, 1867. Excavation for the foundation was underway when two workmen were buried under falling earth on the evening of September 2, 1867. Both survived, although one had severe injuries.

Historic photos show that a varying fenestration identified the three portions of the building, although they were unified by a prominent, dormered, mansard roof with end pavilions that was just being completed in late November of 1867. Follansbee fell ill before his building was completed and was apparently bedridden for the last year and a half of his life as his obituary on April 12, 1869 reported that he had never gotten to see his "beautiful block."

A search through newspaper accounts has failed to identify the name of the architect for the project although Edward Townsend Mix was one of the few local designers who are known to have favored the Second Empire style. Although Birchard and Field owned the east half of the land on which the building was constructed, city directories and newspaper accounts consistently refer to the structure as the "Follansbee Block" through 1885, after which time the designation was applied to a new commercial building that the Follansbee family erected behind T. A. Chapman's department store.

The east portion of the Follansbee building was finally called the "Birchard Block" beginning in the 1907 city directory. There had been another building known as the "Birchard Block", erected by Harvey Birchard that existed from 1860 at the southwest corner of Plankinton Avenue and West Wisconsin Avenue. It was known by that name through 1906 even after being annexed by the Plankinton House Hotel some decades before. The center portion of the building owned by Samuel Field appears to have never been named after Field.

James Francis Birchard (1819-1894) used his east portion of the building for his wholesale and retail furniture business until his bankruptcy in 1877. He retained ownership of the building, however, and leased to a number of tenants. Birchard heirs altered the building by removing the mansard roof and adding a story in 1899. This portion is today Johnson Bank and not included in the proposal by the developer.

The Follansbee Block apparently had halls on the upper stories, perhaps at the mansard roof. There is reference in the Milwaukee Sentinel in 1876 that one of the halls was being partitioned off into "apartments suitable for office purposes." Occupants in Follansbee's Block in 1878 included attorneys, a physician, and a grocer. In 1886 tenants included artists a fancy goods/variety store, attorneys and real estate agents. In 1898 tenants included artists, a physician, a shirt manufacturer, wholesale jeweler, a fur goods manufacturer and attorneys. By 1921 there were women's clothing shops, various insurance agents, a music teacher and interior decorator among others. The most prominent tenant was the Smart Wear Emma Lange Shop

that occupied the premises from the late 1920s through the 1960s. Walgreen's, the most recent tenant, made changes to the storefront in 1983.

The west half of the Follansbee Building underwent alterations by the Follansbee heirs and later owners. The west bays were remodeled into the Art Deco style in 1932, designs supplied by the prominent firm of Kirchhoff and Rose.

The mid section of the building, owned by Samuel Field, was home a dressmaker, a dry goods store and insurance agent in 1878. By 1886 there were dentists and a book agent as tenants. Physicians, lawyers and a dressmaker were in the building in 1898.

### **Ownership Records 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue**

1980 February 1—Robert A Levine and Howard D. Spector

1997 June 5—Caryl G. Spector to Howard D. Spector

2006 June 21—Howard D. Spector to Marshall Block Inc.

2007 January 23—Marshall Block Inc to MBI Properties LLC

**Recommendation**                      Recommend HPC Denial

**Conditions**

**Previous HPC action**                      See above

**Previous Council action**