



**Interim Historic
Designation Study
Report**

**G.F. Bossert Duplex
2502 East Webster
Place**

City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development
Fall, 2001

INTERIM HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

GOTTLob FREDERICK BOSSERT DUPLEX 2502 EAST WEBSTER PLACE

I. NAME

Historic: Gottlob Frederick Bossert Duplex

Common name: 2502 East Webster Place

II. LOCATION 2502 East Webster Place

3rd Aldermanic District, **Alderman Michael D'Amato**

Legal Description: Burke's Subd (E) In SW ¼ Sec 15-7-22 Block 4 W 92' Lot
4

III. CLASSIFICATION Structure

IV. OWNERS: Daniel J. Katz, John B. Crichton, Thomas A. Hauck

V. DESIGNATION REQUESTED BY: Mary A. Wasielewski

VI. YEAR BUILT: 1904¹

ARCHITECT: C.F. Ringer²

¹ Milwaukee Building Permit #1127, dated April 24, 1904. Filed at the Development Center, 809 North Broadway, Milwaukee

² Ibid.

VII. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Bossert duplex is a splendid example of a Milwaukee Luxury Duplex designed in the Arts and Crafts style of architecture. This eye-catching brick structure is one of the more outstanding examples of duplex architecture in its well-known Upper East Side neighborhood. The building is also a pivotal structure in a row of four prominent houses and duplexes that share pleasing urban qualities that include a uniform scale, meticulous detailing and time-honored architectural proportioning.

The area surrounding the duplex and its immediate neighbors is an eclectic mix of late nineteenth and early twentieth century houses, duplexes and brick apartment buildings. The North Downer Avenue commercial district, a thriving two-block long hub of neighborhood commerce, is located ½ block to the east of the subject property.

The Bossert Duplex is a 2-1/2-story hip roofed, rectangular structure topped with very large front and side dormers. The main elevation faces East Webster Place and its major architectural features are a large, central flat roofed front porch flanked by a two-story bay window, and a huge gabled dormer that projects from the center of the steeply pitched roof. The impressive roofline is further enhanced with a slight flaring at the eaves which is a feature referred to as a "canted" roof. The building is meticulously finished with tan iron spot pressed brick that was probably imported from St. Louis, Missouri. The brick are laid with remarkably thin, so-called knife joints that contribute significantly to the very fine finished appearance of the structure. The exterior is further embellished with dressed limestone sills and stucco with half-timber trim.

The front porch that is centered on the main elevation retains its original Doric style fluted columns. It shelters an impressive original front entry door glazed with fine, beveled glass. The spectacular gabled dormer that is centered upon the roof features wooden sidewall shingling, and is fenestrated with four regularly spaced, nine over one, Arts and Crafts style windows. The apex of the gable is trimmed with stucco and half timbering and the eaves are embellished with a massive wooden bargeboard that is one of the hallmarks of Arts and Crafts style architecture.

The west side elevation facing North Stowell Avenue is architecturally embellished with a private entry for the upper flat, a large projecting stuccoed bay above that, and a massive, steeply pitched dormer projecting from the roof in the attic story. The remainder of the elevation is fenestrated with double hung windows that are placed to respond to the needs of the interior.

The side elevation facing east is relatively simple in character featuring randomly placed double hung windows trimmed with dressed limestone sills. The walls are finished with fine, iron spot pressed brick. The rear elevation facing north is treated in a similar fashion.

In sum, the Bossert Duplex is a well-preserved example of a Luxury Duplex and it is an important visual anchor on the northeast corner of East Webster Place and North Stowell Avenue. The building retains nearly all of its original character and there have been no major exterior changes with the exception of the replacement of the original balustrade on the first and second stories of the front porch.

VIII. HISTORY

Architecture

The Bossert duplex is representative of the architectural diversity, meticulous craftsmanship, and superb materials that characterize the best residential construction in Milwaukee at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Luxury Duplexes

The Luxury Duplex is a housing type that is decidedly rare in America and it enjoyed a rather high degree of development in Milwaukee during the early twentieth century. Built as a two family house with upper and lower flats but often designed to purposely resemble a large single family house, the luxury duplex was a premium structure that combined the amenities and spaciousness of two fine, single-family houses under one roof. Based on the concept of the classic Milwaukee Duplex, the luxury duplex was constructed primarily in the period between the two World Wars, but some examples began appearing in Milwaukee during the early 1890s.

The Bossert Duplex is a very early example of the Luxury Duplex. It has a separate impressive entrance on the side elevation and is addressed at 2554 North Stowell Avenue. The Bossert duplex has, in a way, been architecturally "camouflaged" to resemble a large single family house and this feature separates it from the classic Milwaukee duplex which is usually easy to spot because of its paired front entry doors and regularly-placed windows.

History of the Property

The Gottlob Frederick Bossert House was once part of a multi-acre tract that had belonged to banking and railroad magnate, Alexander Mitchell. Real Estate developer Edmund Burke purchased ten acres of this tract in 1882. Burke had the land surveyed in April of 1883 and platted a subdivision that he named after himself. Lots were generously sized at 60-feet by 122-feet with corner lots laid out at 72-feet by 122-feet. E. Burke's Subdivision was recorded in June of 1885. The subdivision was bounded by Downer Avenue to the east, E. Bradford Avenue to the south, and N. Prospect Avenue to the west. The north boundary fell halfway through the blocks lying between E. Webster Place and E. Bellevue Place. Downer Avenue evolved from an unpaved dirt road named Glen Avenue into a thriving commercial district due to the development a street railway line as well as unique garages that were built to house retail businesses as well as store the automobiles of the adjacent, densely built up residential blocks. These blocks west of Downer Avenue were initially built with a mix of single family and duplex residences but apartment buildings also began to appear by 1910. The lots in these residential blocks were traded by investors over a period of ten to fifteen years, and typically increased in value from \$1400 to over \$4000 by the latter 1890's when actual house construction began. Interestingly, most of the generous sized lots were split into two parcels and the resulting development took on the dense urban character that can be seen today.

The duplex residence at 2502 E. Webster Place sits on the west 92 feet of Lot 4 and had gone through six changes in ownership before being purchased by Gottlob Bossert in July of 1900. The 76-year-old Bossert transferred the property to his son Gottlob Frederick Bossert in November of 1903. Gottlob Frederick commissioned local architect C. F. Ringer

to design a dwelling for the site. The permit for the \$7000 brick veneered building was taken out on April 22, 1904. It was positioned at the west end of the lot, close to the intersection of Webster and Stowell, to allow for a side yard to the east. While the permit records identify this building as a single family dwelling, there appears to be an original second entrance on the Stowell Avenue side of the building. This entrance with stairwell leads to the second floor and, presumably, an original second floor flat. We know from city directories that Bossert continued to live at his Franklin Place residence for some years after the construction of this building and apparently rented out the Webster Place flats. At this time we do not know who the original occupants were.

Bossert was the superintendent of the Pfister & Vogel Leather Company in Walker's Point and perhaps it is this connection that led to his choice of Carl F. Ringer as the architect for his income property. Ringer is known to have designed a number of buildings for the Pfister & Vogel tannery as well as the Zohrlaut tannery and completed a six-story building for the Pfister & Vogel tannery in 1896. His substantial body of work also includes commercial buildings in the Third Ward as well as numerous residences and apartment buildings.

In April 1909 Bossert purchased the Auld family home at 2512 E. Webster Place and it is presumed he rented out this property as well. At about the time that Bossert moved from his Franklin Place home to Shepard Avenue he sold off his two rental properties. Archie L. Rodee purchased the more modest frame house at 2512 E. Webster Place on April 15, 1920. The finer brick flat with half-timbered gables in the dormers was purchased by Cornelia Marnitz on September 1, 1919. Members of the Marnitz family would occupy the building into the 1960's. William Marnitz, who is thought to be Cornelia's son, lived here with his wife Louise and son William, Jr. Cornelia also lived on the premises. William Sr. was the president of William Marnitz Company, a tailoring business located on Mason Street downtown. The Marnitz Company advertised itself as the "makers of correct clothes for the man who cares." The Marnitz family lived downstairs then moved to the upper flat around 1930 then downstairs again by the early 1940's, about the time that Cornelia transferred the property to William Marnitz. Tenants over the years included salesman Frederick J. Hayden, John G. Hay, surgeon William Carson, Phillip W. Grossman, John F. Bloomer, and Fred Zillman. Louise Marnitz died in 1953 and William remarried. William died in the late 1960's and widow Bernice Marnitz sold the property to Read Investment Company on April 30, 1969 for \$23,000. Daniel Katz, John B. Crighton, Thomas Hauk and Wellston Property Management acquired the property from Read Investment in 1985 that gave them control over all the properties in the block bounded by Downer Avenue, Webster Place, Stowell Avenue and Bellevue Place. Since 1993 the property has been under the sole name of Daniel Katz.

THE ARCHITECT

Carl F. Ringer, Sr. was born 1850/1851 in Germany and came to the Milwaukee in 1870/1871. He was employed in the architectural firms of George Mygatt, Edward Townsend Mix and James Douglas before opening his own office in 1881. He quickly obtained some choice commissions from Adolph Meinecke, Pfister & Vogel Tannery, and various churches as Zion Church at 21st and North and was able to employ several draftsmen by 1892. He was also known for superintending the construction of his designs. He had many clients among the German Americans of the city's west side and designed dozens of houses, most of which have been razed. One notable example still extant is the Queen Anne style David W. Howie House (1886) on Wells Street now listed in the National Register. Ringer also designed a number of commercial buildings in the Third Ward and

had industrial commissions as well. Later commissions included residential work on the lower east side.

In 1904 his son, Carl F. Ringer, Jr. joined him in the practice and the firm became known as C.F. Ringer & Son. Carl Sr. retired in 1934 but the younger Carl continued to work under the Ringer & Son name until his own death in 1938. Mayor Emil Seidel appointed Carl Sr. as City Inspector in June 1911. After a conflict with later Mayor G. A. Bading over whether or not to raze a building, Ringer was fired. He went to court and the State Supreme Court ordered his reinstatement with full back pay. Ringer submitted his resignation that same day and was proud that the building he wanted rehabilitated was later repaired and used for many years thereafter.

Ringer was a member of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Milwaukee Turnverein, and the Freie Gemeinde Society, for which he designed the clubhouse on Fond du Lac Avenue that is locally designated. Ringer was involved in the establishment of the Badger Exploring Company and the Milwaukee Vinegar Company and also sat on the Harbor Commission and served as vice-president. Ringer Sr. died in April 1939 and was survived by two sons, Erwin and Adolph, and three sisters, one of whom was Mrs. Bertha Benz. She was the widow of German inventor Carl Benz, one of the designers of Mercedes-Benz.

The Bossert/Marnitz House is a fine example of Ringer's work and shows his finesse at adding subtle details like the elegant dormers and a columned porch to further enhance the elegance of a fine East Side house. This example is unique in his known body of work.

IX. SIGNIFICANCE

The G. F. Bossert Duplex is architecturally significant to the city as a very early, outstanding example of a Milwaukee Luxury Duplex designed in the Arts and Crafts style. It is a particularly good example of a specific building type that enjoyed a very high degree of development in Milwaukee and has contributed significantly to the unique architectural character of the city.

Duplex architecture enjoyed a particularly high degree of development in Milwaukee and has contributed significantly to the unique architectural character of the city. The Bossert Duplex is a building important to the architectural character of Milwaukee and this is a very good example of the style.

The building is also significant as a fine example of the design work of Milwaukee architect C. F. Ringer whose work has enhanced the architectural character of many fine older Milwaukee neighborhoods including the Upper East Side where the subject building is located.

X. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that The Bossert Duplex at 2502 East Webster Place be considered for interim designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-5 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

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

Rationale:

Criterion e-5 is used because the building is an excellent and very early example of the Milwaukee Luxury Duplex, a building type that reached a high degree of development in this city, and because it is a fine example of the Arts and Crafts Style.

Criterion e-6 is used because architect Carl F. Ringer was an accomplished designer whose residential, commercial and industrial work can be found throughout the city. The Bossert Duplex is a design unique in his known body of residential work.

XI. REFERENCES

Milwaukee City Directories

City of Milwaukee Building Permit files

Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin: Volume 2. A Manual for Historic Properties. Madison, Wisconsin: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

Milwaukee County Register of Deeds. Deed research for the subject property.

Milwaukee Journal, various dates.

Milwaukee Sentinel, various dates

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.

A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. If skylights are allowed they should be placed where they will not be visible from the public right of way.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- 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 method possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive blasting to brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. These methods of cleaning erode the surface of the material and accelerate deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. 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 or terra cotta.
- 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.
- 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 windowpanes 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 (i.e., installing Colonial style windows in place of original Arts and Crafts style windows).

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.

E. Additions

Additions are permitted with the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the building. The commission will review the compatibility of the addition with the historic 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 building.

F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require 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. Site features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures should respect and enhance the historic architectural character of the building.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the building.