A Look Back in Time

The **Graham Block, 5036-38 Sixth Avenue,** is located within a streetscape of commercial buildings in an area now known as "Harborside". Harborside sits primarily along a three block area of Sixth Avenue located several blocks north of Kenosha's downtown commercial district. The Graham Block building was found to be architecturally significant under Standard 3 of the City's Zoning Ordinance as a fine example of a 1910 commercial building with simple Classical Revival details and a very well-crafted use of terra cotta materials. The Graham Block building was designated a local landmark on August 15, 2003.

The Graham Block, constructed in 1913, shares a party wall with its neighbor to the east, but a narrow space separates it from the neighbor to the west. The building has brick walls with a main elevation or storefront covered with smooth terra cotta tiles glazed a stark white. The top of the building above the cornice rises at the center to a very shallow gable parapet and there are some very simple Classical Revival details that accent both the first and second stories of this elevation. These details include diamond and square terra cotta panels embossed with rosettes on the second story above a simple terra cotta cornice. Flanking the top gable are small rectangular terra cotta panels decorated to suggest capitals. Under the simple cornice is a row of narrow terra cotta panels with a classical motif. At the center above the cornice is a large triangular panel with large grey letters spelling out "Graham Block."

In between the simple paired sash windows of the second story are flat terra cotta "pilasters" topped with square panels with rosette motifs. The sills under the window pairs are accented with shallow raised terra cotta pieces. A line of raised terra cotta also sits over the transoms of the two storefronts. Flanking the storefronts are terra cotta pilasters with recessed columns topped with "foliated" capitals. A similar pilaster sits in between the storefronts.

The storefronts are identical. They have a central two-part show window flanked by recessed entrances. To the right of each show window there is an entrance into the store, and both entrances are modern glass and metal doors. On the left are the entrances to the second story. These entrances are both the original wood and glass doors, but their transoms have been enclosed. The main transoms of the storefronts have also been enclosed.

According to the Wisconsin Historical Society's Division of Historic Preservation's Cultural Resource Management Plan, terra cotta is an ancient building material made of cast and fired clay components that are either glazed or painted. The use of terra cotta became popular in the United States during the late nineteenth century, and reached its peak of popularity during the first few decades of the twentieth century, especially in Wisconsin. The most popular use of terra cotta was in the form of glazed panels that embellished primarily commercial buildings. In 1986, when the Plan was published, not much was known about the use of terra cotta in Wisconsin, but it was suspected that it was popular in medium and large cities in the State.

Adding to its architectural significance is the Graham Block's high level of integrity, especially for a commercial building. A few elements, such as transoms, have been enclosed on the building's storefronts, but the original forms of the storefronts are intact and provide a good look at the composition of storefronts from the early twentieth century. These details, suggesting the Classical Revival style, are well-executed and stand out on the building's exterior. The Graham Block is architecturally significant because it is one of the best examples of several trends in commercial building construction in Kenosha. Its main elevation covering of terra cotta is one of the finest and most intact examples of this type of building material, popular in Kenosha during the 1910s and 1920s. Its size is typical of the small commercial buildings built in the early twentieth century and its relatively intact double storefront is a good illustration of this type of commercial construction in the city. The subtle, but well-executed Classical Revival details are also typical of many buildings from the 1910s. Overall, the combinations of good design, fine construction methods and materials, and a high level of historic integrity makes this building stand out in the commercial building fabric of Kenosha.

Recently redeveloped "Harborside" with it's new sidewalks, tree plantings, and period streetlights make this part of Kenosha's Sixth Avenue one of the most attractive areas in the community. Definitely an area you will not want to miss.