

A Look Back in Time

The Bernard and Julie Eichelman House, located at 510 60th Street, is a residential building that sits on a small corner lot in a residential neighborhood just east of Kenosha's downtown commercial district. The small, urban lot has a mature lawn with no landscaping. Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site must meet at least one (1) of the six (6) standards. The Bernard and Julia Eichelman House is historically significant under Standard 1 - "Exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural...history." The Eichelman House is historically significant because of its' association with prominent businessman Bernard Eichelman and because it was the first location of the Kenosha Hospital, one of the City's most significant health care institutions. As an early home of the Kenosha Hospital Training School for Nurses, the building is also significant because these training programs were essential to the success of early hospitals. The Eichelman House was originally designated a Kenosha Historic Site in 1979 and re-designated on November 18, 1996.

The Bernard and Julia Eichelman House is a two-story residential building with the general form and massing of the Italianate style. The house has a rectangular plan with a two-story main block and a large two-story rear ell. The entire house has a low-pitched hip roof with very wide, overhanging eaves decorated with a scalloped molding. A narrow wooden frieze also spans the entire house. The cream brick walls are punctuated with many single-light, double-hung sashes decorated with brick jack arches and stone sills. A stone water table separates the brick walls from the cut stone foundation. The main entrance is in the east elevation and consists of a simple entry door covered with a hip-roofed overhang supported by thin round posts. A modern staircase and balustrade leads up to the entrance. The entrance in the south elevation of the ell is in an enclosed porch that has a shed roof, wood siding, and an entrance decorated with narrow sidelights and a transom. The house underwent a renovation that has returned the home to much of its original appearance. The renovation included a stone veneer and a late nineteenth century front porch.



Historic maps indicate that there was a house on this lot as early as 1861, owned by W. Davis, and historic accounts indicate that this was a one-story structure that Ben and Julia Eichelman added to and remodeled when they acquired it around 1872. A historic photograph from around 1884 shows the house looking about like it does today. Ben and Julie Eichelman owned the house until 1903, when it was sold to the newly-formed Kenosha Hospital.

Bernard and Julie Eichelman were both natives of Germany who came to New York State prior to their marriage in 1855. Bernard Eichelman, a tailor, and his wife moved to Chicago in 1870. Reportedly, Eichelman was burned out in the great

Chicago fire and the family came to Kenosha in 1872. Eichelman worked for another clothing establishment in Kenosha before opening his own men's clothing and tailoring shop in 1875. The business became successful and Ben Eichelman became involved in other business interests, as well as community affairs. Eichelman donated Eichelman Park to the City, which lies along the lakefront not far from this property.

In April 1903, prominent citizens in Kenosha met to form a community hospital. The hospital board purchased this property in August 1903, and remodeled it into the 12-bed Kenosha Hospital that opened in October 1903. The new hospital was a success and by 1908, a larger building was needed. In 1909, a site was purchased, and by 1911, a new hospital building was erected. In order to adequately staff the hospital, a training school for nurses opened in 1904. The nurse trainees probably trained in this building originally, then moved to the new hospital facility when it was opened in 1911. However, between 1918 and 1925, the Kenosha Hospital Training School for Nurses again occupied this house. After several decades of private ownership, the Eichelman House was again acquired for a public use. In 1974, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church acquired the property for a half-way house for alcoholics.

The Bernard and Julia Eichelman House is historically significant for two (2) reasons. First, it was the home of one of Kenosha's prominent nineteenth century businessmen, Ben Eichelman. A successful merchant, Eichelman also made an important gift of land to help form Eichelman Park, an important City park along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Second, the house was the first location of the Kenosha Hospital, an important social welfare institution in the City.

There were few hospitals in nineteenth century Wisconsin, but after the turn of the century, as medical science advanced, the demand for hospitals increased. Most medium-sized and large communities established small hospitals during the first two (2) decades of the twentieth century. They were usually established by progressive physicians or by community groups, and many were administered by religious orders. The earliest hospitals usually were housed in large residences, but because medical science was making surgery common and many severe illnesses treatable, many of the new hospitals were successful and soon moved to buildings especially constructed for hospital use. Because of the need for trained staff, many hospitals started training programs for nurses. Many of these programs were short-lived, while others developed into three-year registered nurse diploma programs that operated until the late 1960s.

Because of the expansion and changes in the medical industry during the twentieth century, most hospitals have few, if any, historic resources still extant. The Eichelman House is significant because it is not only a historic resource related to Kenosha Hospital, but because it is the first location and helped establish this important medical institution. It is also significant as an early location of the Kenosha Hospital Training School for Nurses. The training of nurses was important to the success of hospitals, and until nursing programs were transferred to four-year colleges, nursing school educated most of the professional nursing staff in the hospitals.

It is because of the building's long and impressive history, that the Eichelman House was considered for historic designation. The house's Italianate style and history warrant further investigation.