

A Look Back in Time

The Hale-Farr House, located at 6026 Eighth Avenue, is a contributing structure in the Library Park Historic District, a National Register District, thus making the house eligible to be designated a historic landmark under Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance. In addition, the property meets standards one and three of Section 15.04. Standard one reads: "Exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural, social,...history." Since the 1920's, the Kenosha Woman's Club has occupied the house, thus contributing to the overall growth and development of social organizations and woman's history in the city. Standard three reads: "Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style..." The building exhibits "Flemish" gables characteristic of the German Renaissance Revival style; the unusual style is distinctive in Wisconsin.

This house was rebuilt around 1890, possibly utilizing some of the exterior of the old house on this lot constructed for Samuel Hale, a local businessman. It has a basic square main block of brick construction with large Italianate-type window openings. There are heavily carved stone window hoods decorating these openings supported by large brackets. This turn of the century photograph of the house indicates that these hoods were more decorative than they appear today. The two-and one-half story house has a steep hipped roof with projecting gables on the side facades that are decorated in the German Renaissance Revival style. These shaped gables feature returned eaves, corbelling, and arched windows decorated with an elaborate hood. A similar gable on the front of the house has been removed. A veranda covered the front facade at one time; however, a small overhang now covers the entrance that is decorated with elaborate leaded-glass sidelights and a transom. Large leaded-glass windows are also found on the side facades. At the rear is a



meeting room added in the mid twentieth century and used for the current occupant, the Woman's Club. The interior of the house is entirely late nineteenth century. It features elaborate pressed metal ceilings on the first floor, classical window and door moldings, a gracious main staircase, and a third floor ballroom that still has its built-in sitting benches along the walls.

Most of the architectural styles in the district are commonly seen styles in Wisconsin communities. The Hale-Farr house is an exception. In its original condition, the house was built to resemble a large and impressive chateau. This was expressed primarily in the use of heavy window hoodmolds, numerous corbelled chimneys, and the shaped, decorated gables.

While much of its front facade detail has been removed, so that the house today has less of an impressive appearance, the window hoodmolds and shaped gables on the side facades still exist, giving us a glimpse of the original chateausque quality of the design.

William Farr and his family lived in the house until around 1916. Besides being a surgeon for the Chicago and North Western Railroad Company, he was the Mayor of Kenosha between 1894 and 1897. Between 1916 and 1923, the Horace Johnson family lived in the house. Horace G. Johnson patented a design for underclothing and, in partnership with Henry Cooper, formed Cooper's Kenosha Closed Krotch Underwear Company, the forerunner of Jockey International, a leading Kenosha industry in the twentieth century. The Kenosha Woman's Club acquired the house in 1923. The Woman's Club was founded in 1891, primarily as a study group. By the 1930s, club meetings primarily revolved around guest speakers and club members engaged in various civic projects. The club met in various locations prior to the acquisition of the Hale-Farr House.

An important social and civic group in the city is the Kenosha Woman's Club. According to Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan, woman's clubs were the organizations most active, middle-class women belonged to in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The most popular of these clubs were affiliated with the Wisconsin Federation of Woman's Clubs, founded in 1896. The member clubs conducted activities that ranged from political activity to social events. Civic work was a major part of many club's agendas, and the clubs provided an important outlet for many women who desired to participate in the political system but were either left out because they could not vote, or because they were not part of the formal power structure in their communities.

The Kenosha Woman's Club began in 1891 when ten women met to discuss forming a woman's club. The original group decided to keep membership at 50 and be primarily a literary and social group. In the early years, the group met two times a month and studied topics as diverse as Greek history and literature to Russian history and literature. The format of the meetings was that scholarly papers would be read, followed by a discussion session. In the 1920s, the group began having outside speakers and by the 1930s, programs consisted entirely of speakers. The Woman's Club met at a number of locations including downtown halls and the library. In 1923, the group acquired the old Hale-Farr house, remodeled it, and have occupied it as their headquarters ever since. The Woman's Club in Kenosha continues to be a social and civic force in the community, and its location in Library Park is appropriate since it has historically drawn its membership from the middle-class women who historically lived in the neighborhood, among other areas. Because it represents an important element in woman's organizational history in Kenosha, the Woman's Club building, the Hale-Farr House at 6026 Eighth Avenue is significant for local history and contributes to the variety of public buildings in the district.

As you drive around Library Park to take in the impressive Hale-Farr House, keep in mind not only the distinctive architectural style of the house, but the social contribution made by the Woman's Club to Kenosha since 1891.