

A Look Back in Time

*S*itting on a small corner lot within the City's Pearl Street Historic District at **1213 55th Street** is a commercial building known as the **Maple House**. Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. The Maple House is architecturally significant under Standard No. 3, "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen..." The Maple House is a fine and very well restored example of a late nineteenth century commercial building constructed in the Romanesque Revival architectural style. The Romanesque Revival style was a popular style for small commercial buildings in Wisconsin, and this well-restored building is a good illustration of how the style was used to make a typical brick building elegant and stylish. The Maple House was originally designated a Kenosha Historic Site in 1979 and re-designated an individual historic landmark on November 18, 1996.

*T*he Maple House is a two-story Romanesque Revival commercial building that has a flat roof decorated with brick corbeling that suggests a projecting cornice with dentils and brackets. The cream brick walls are punctuated with many round-arched openings. On the second story, these openings are filled with two-light glazing and are decorated with large brick arches that have pronounced archivolt trim and molded imposts that are joined to form an impost course decorated with dentils. The attached arches create an arcaded effect, particularly on the west elevation of the building. Most of the first story openings are larger and filled with either two-light glazing or large single lights with round-arched transoms. Like the second story openings, these openings are decorated with large round brick arches with archivolt trim and a molded impost course that creates an arcaded effect. The main entrance to the building is at the northwest corner and consists of a large wood paneled door decorated with sidelights and a small rectangular transom. Topping the entrance is a large round-arched transom decorated with the same brick arch seen on the other openings of the building. A smaller entrance sits in the center of the west elevation and it is decorated in a similar manner. Above the main entrance is an oriel that has three single-light, double-hung sash windows and sheathing with simple classical trim.



*T*he Maple House was built between 1894 and 1900 to provide more space for the original Maple House boarding house already in operation at the old Sholes House next door (1207 55th Street). The new Maple House was constructed on the site of a one-story frame saloon ell that was attached to the northwest corner of the old Sholes House. The new building was constructed as a separate structure, attached to the Sholes House by a narrow ell, also constructed between 1894 and 1900 (not

extant). This ell housed a bowling alley for many years. Because of its proximity to the railroad depot, many of the Maple House boarders were railroad workers. During the late nineteenth century, the proprietor of the old and new Maple House was John F. Schmitt. Around 1890, the Schlitz Brewing Company acquired the Maple House. Schlitz operated a beer depot in a building directly east of the original Maple House (old Sholes House) and probably operated the saloon in the Maple House after it acquired the property. During the last years of Schlitz ownership in the 1940s, the Maple House was briefly renamed the Schlitz Hotel. By the 1980s, the Maple House, along with the other buildings of this small commercial streetscape, had become severely run-down; but in the 1990s, this building, with its bowling alley ell razed, was renovated, as was the original Maple House (old Sholes House) and others along the Street. It is currently being used as an office building.

The Maple House is architecturally significant because it is a fine example of a late nineteenth century Romanesque Revival commercial building. The Romanesque Revival style was popular between 1855 and 1885 and is seen primarily in churches or commercial buildings. The hallmarks of the style are round-arched openings, brick corbeling, and towers with parapets or pyramidal roofs. This building is a fine example of the style because it has well-executed brick corbeling and fine round-arched openings. In fact, it is the arched openings, with their large and impressive brick arches, blended together in an arcaded effect, that give the building much of its architectural style and elegance. The brick corbeled cornice is another outstanding feature of the building and the brickwork throughout is of the highest quality.

Even more significance, though, is that the Maple House is a fine example of a typical commercial building of the late nineteenth century, specifically because it has been so well restored. There are few commercial buildings in Kenosha that have not had minor to major alterations, and in particular, nineteenth century commercial buildings have seen the most changes. This building, because it has been restored to its historic appearance, is a fine illustration of what commercial buildings looked like before they were altered during the twentieth century.

Now that we have had a break in the weather, it would be the perfect time to enjoy the architectural beauty of the restored Maple House and possibly extend your excursion just to the north through the Civic Center Historic District. It will be worth your time.