

A Look Back in Time

The Mathias Zievers House located at 5041 Sixth Avenue is considered architecturally and historically significant in accordance with Standard 3 of Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance. The Zievers House "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen..." Specifically, the Zievers House is a good example of small Greek Revival house, a house type once very numerous in Kenosha. This house is also historically significant because it represents the type of residential construction that once made up a great deal of pioneer Kenosha. Built prior to the Civil War, the Zievers house has a scale and type of construction typical of early Kenosha reflecting the city's early settlement period. This house was originally designated a Kenosha Historic Landmark in 1988. In 1996, the house was reevaluated and re-designated as a local landmark.

The Mathias Zievers House is a one and one-half story residential building with a rectangular plan and details from the Greek Revival style of architecture. The house has a low-pitched gable roof decorated with a simple wooden frieze and returned eaves at the end gables. The walls are covered with wooden shingles, an alternation probably from the early twentieth century. The building has regular fenestration of double-hung sash windows decorated with simple wooden cornice lintels. The main entrance is decorated with a narrow transom and a simple wooden surround. The front porch features simple square posts supporting a hipped roof. Under the roofline is frieze with a decorative cut-out of circles and crosses. The porch was probably added in the late nineteenth century, perhaps replacing an original structure. Extending from the rear of the main block of the house is a large ell that lengthens the building considerably.



German immigrant Mathias Zievers was born in 1823 and came to Kenosha in 1857. Since he worked as a carpenter for 19 years, it can be assumed that he constructed this house (or at least the main block) around 1857. In 1876, he opened a saloon near his place of residence. Historic tax rolls indicate that Zievers owned the property until 1897, when it was purchased by Katherine Bach, who probably did not live there. City directories indicate that Edward Zievers lived in the house until 1908, followed by Michael and Emma Donahue, who lived there until the late 1960s.

The Zievers house is architecturally significant because it features typical pre-Civil War Greek Revival style details and because it is typical of the type of house built during the city's early history. The Greek Revival style is most commonly seen in Wisconsin vernacular houses in the form of symmetrical massing, regular fenestration, simple cornices and returned eaves, and entrances decorated with a transom and/or sidelights. The Zievers house is a good example of this commonly seen variation of the Greek Revival style. It is also of interest that the original owner was a carpenter who probably built many houses in Kenosha in his 19-year career. The house is also historically significant because it represents the early settlement period in Kenosha. Although there are a few alterations on the house, it has retained most of its pre-Civil War appearance and reflects the type of housing common to that era, but rarely seen today.

To truly appreciate the historic value of this pre-Civil War house, you need to see it for yourself. Now that the weather has warmed, a stroll by this Greek Revival house will give you a feel for life in the early settlement days of Kenosha.