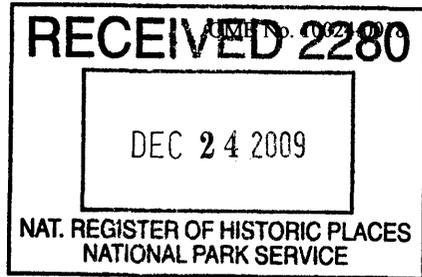


1314



**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Main Avenue Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 301 - 377 (odd only) Main Avenue N/A not for publication
city or town De Pere N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Brown code 009 zip code 54115

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination _ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _ nationally _ statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] Date 12/16/09
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _ meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria.
(_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Main Avenue Historic District

Brown

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

2-3-10

for

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 structure
 site
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
14	4 buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
14	4 total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/
Classical Revival

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation STONE

walls BRICK

LIMESTONE

roof ASPHALT

other STONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Main Avenue Historic District
Name of Property

Brown
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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1883-1950

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Thomsen Bros.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Main Avenue Historic District
Name of Property

Brown
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Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Various, see separate listing.

organization

street & number

city or town

state

Wisconsin

date

telephone

zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Continuation Sheet

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

Description:

The city of De Pere is divided into east and west portions by the north-south-flowing Fox River. The Main Avenue Historic District is located on the west side of this river and it contains the most intact concentration of nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century commercial buildings that are located in the historic downtown commercial district of this portion of the city.¹ The district consists of eighteen buildings, all of which face north onto the 300 block of the highly important thoroughfare known as Main Avenue. Of these eighteen buildings, fourteen are considered to be contributing resources and most of them were built between 1883 and 1950 as masonry replacements for earlier buildings on the same sites. The other four buildings are considered to be non-contributing because of either their late date of construction or because they have now been greatly altered.

Of the district's fourteen contributing buildings, three were built prior to 1883; one was built in 1887; one was built in 1900; six were built between 1910 and 1920; one was built between 1920 and 1930; one was built between 1930 and 1940, and one between 1940 and 1950.² The contributing buildings range from one to two stories in height, all of them are either rectilinear or square in plan, and all are of masonry construction. In addition to the older Commercial Vernacular, Queen Anne style, and Twentieth Century Commercial style buildings that make up the bulk of the district's resources, the district also includes a fine Neoclassical Revival style building (the Bank of West De Pere, 371 Main Ave.).

As is typical of the older commercial buildings in other Wisconsin cities, most of the district's original first story storefronts have been lost to subsequent modernization, although three of them still retain their original cast iron supporting posts and lintels. The upper floors of these facades are all still largely intact, and most also retain their original masonry cornices. The buildings all have concrete sidewalks in front of them that are edged with concrete curbs and gutters.

The Main Avenue Historic District was part of a larger historic commercial area that once extended for two blocks along both sides of the 300 and 400 blocks of the east-west running Main Avenue. This commercial district came into being because the east end of Main Avenue originally ended at the west end of the first bridge that was built across the Fox River in De Pere in 1851. This bridge was the only means of crossing the river for many years thereafter and, as a result, a commercial district quickly established itself around this point. This district grew along with the rest of the city and it continued to be the principal hub of economic activity on the west side of De Pere in the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout much of the early and mid-twentieth century as well.

¹ The population of De Pere in 2000 was 20,559. Main Avenue is also State Highway 32.

² Several of these buildings were later modernized but these modernizations occurred during the period of significance.

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

Design, integrity, and density set the buildings in the Main Avenue Historic District apart from the other historic period commercial buildings in the downtown area of this portion of the city of De Pere. Many of the other nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that once flanked the district have been demolished and many of those that remain have now been either greatly altered or else their group integrity has been seriously diminished by the addition of modern buildings that replaced demolished historic examples. Consequently, the Main Avenue Historic District now constitutes the best remaining intact contiguous group of historic commercial buildings remaining in the downtown portion of De Pere's west side.

INVENTORY

The following inventory lists every building in the District along with the names of the original owners, the construction date, the address, and also the resource's contributing (C) or non-contributing (NC) status. The abbreviations given below for architectural styles are the same abbreviations used by the Wisconsin Historical Society's Division of Historic Preservation. These are as follows:

- BO = Boomtown
- COM = Commercial Vernacular
- CON = Contemporary
- NE = Neoclassical Revival
- QU = Queen Anne
- TC = Twentieth Century Commercial
- WR = Wrightian

C	301	Main Avenue	Frank Deboth Building	1887	COM
C	305	Main Avenue	John Pfiffer Building	1913	QU
C	313	Main Avenue	Thomsen Bros. Building	1912	QU/COM
C	315-317	Main Avenue	Fred Gabel Building	1915	QU
NC	321	Main Avenue	Henry Rahr Building	1891/ Post- 1950	COM/ CON
NC	327	Main Avenue	Van Den Heuvel Electric Co. Building	1966	CON
NC	331	Main Avenue	Henry Collette Building	Pre- 1883	BO

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Main Avenue Historic District
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C	337	Main Avenue	G. H. Salter Building	1900	COM
C	339-341	Main Avenue	Jacob Bros. Building	1940-1950	TC
C	345	Main Avenue	William Van Dyk Building	1933	TC
C	351-353	Main Avenue	Max L. Franc Building	Pre-1884/ 1923-1947	TC
C	355	Main Avenue	Van Gemert Marble Works Building	1914/ 1923	TC
NC	363	Main Avenue	Building	1960s	WR
C	365	Main Avenue	Louis E. Secor Building	1913	TC
C	367	Main Avenue	Louis E. Secor Investment Building	1928	TC
C	371	Main Avenue	Bank of West De Pere	1920	NE
C	375	Main Avenue	Building	Pre-1883/ 1930-1950	TC
C	377	Main Avenue	Henry Strong Building	Pre-1883	COM

What follows are brief descriptions of some of the district's contributing resources, which are listed in numerical order by address.

301 Main Avenue Frank Deboth Building 1887

The Frank Deboth Building is a two-story, rectilinear plan, Commercial Vernacular form building that measures 30-feet-wide by 80-feet-deep. The building was constructed in 1887, it has stone foundation walls, and the walls that rest on this foundation are fashioned out of cream brick. The main facade, which faces north onto Main Avenue, is almost symmetrical in design and it is crowned by a brick parapet that is decorated with red bricks that are linked together to form a repeated chevron pattern.

The first story of the façade consists of a storefront that has a centered, deeply recessed entrance that is flanked on both sides by a large one-light display window placed above a paneled bulkhead, and both

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

of these display windows are held in place by cast-iron posts that support a cast iron lintel that spans the width of the façade. This entire storefront is still intact, as is the entrance door to the second story above, which is placed to the right of the storefront between two brick pilaster strips. The original second story of the façade is also still largely intact. This story is three-bays-wide and each bay contains a single segmental-arched window opening that contains a one-over-one-light double hung window. These windows have now been replaced with later one-over-one-light double hung aluminum sash, but the openings themselves, which have corbelled brick heads and dressed stone sills, are still intact.

The Deboth building occupies the southwest corner that was created by the intersection of Main Avenue and Third Street and consequently has an exposed east-facing side elevation as well. The first story of this elevation is five-bays-wide while the second story above is seven-bays-wide and they also contain later one-over-one-light windows.

This building replaced an earlier one-story frame building of the same width owned by Deboth. The start of its construction was noted in the local newspaper.

Frank Deboth, of West DePere, calculates building a two-story brick business block on the site his present frame building is on. Operations will be commenced as soon as the frost is out of the ground.³

The new building was operated as a saloon during Deboth's period of ownership and for many years thereafter and it is the most intact of all the district's buildings.

305 Main Avenue

John Pfiffer Building

1913⁴

Although built 26 years later, the design of this two-story-tall, rectilinear plan, Queen Anne style building was clearly inspired by the Deboth Building next door. Like the Deboth building, this one is also built out of brick (dark orange brick in this case), it is also 30-feet-wide by 80-feet-deep, it is exactly the same height, and its asymmetrically designed north-facing main façade is also crowned by a brick parapet that is decorated with bricks that are linked together to form a repeated chevron pattern that is both identical to the one on the Deboth building and which also acts as a continuation of it.

³ *Brown County Democrat*. February 24, 1887, p. 1.

⁴ City of De Pere Historic Real Estate Tax Assessment Rolls.

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

The first story of the main façade contains a storefront that consists of a large display window opening whose original transom is now covered over with modern materials and whose original one-light display window has now been replaced by three modern windows. Placed just to the right of this display window is a deeply recessed entrance vestibule. Here, however, the entrance door to the store is placed on the splayed left (east) side wall of the vestibule while the entrance door to the second story is placed adjacent to it and to the right on the flat south wall of the vestibule. Both of these doors are crowned by tall transom lights, the display window opening is flanked by cast-iron posts, and these posts and a brick pilaster strip at the extreme right-hand side of the storefront all support a cast iron lintel that spans the width of the façade.

The second story of the façade is still largely intact. This story is two-bays-wide and the left-hand bay contains a single segmental-arched window opening that has a dressed stone sill and which contains a one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window. Placed just to the left of this window is a three-sided, hip-roofed oriel bay whose wider north-facing side contains a single fixed light having a one-light transom above it. The two sides of this bay, however, each contain a smaller one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window.

Sanborn-Perris maps show that this was the first building on this site and they also show that the original first story occupant was a millinery shop while the second story was used as a hall, possibly one that was rented to a fraternal organization.

313 Main Avenue Thomsen Bros. Building 1912

Historic photos show that this two-story-tall, dark orange brick-clad, rectilinear plan, 22-foot-wide by 80-foot-deep building originally had a Queen Anne style design that was similar to the Pfiffer building located next door to the left (east). As originally built, the first story of its north-facing asymmetrically designed main façade consisted of a storefront that had a display window placed to the left of its two deeply recessed entrance doors while the second story consisted of a three-sided, hip-roofed oriel bay window that was placed to the left of a single window opening.

At some later date, the second story oriel bay was removed from the north-facing main façade and the rectilinear opening in the wall surface that was thereby created was filled with a Chicago style three-light window. This window opening is flanked by brick pilasters on either side that are crowned with stepped stone capitals and an additional pilaster of this design also flanks the smaller original window opening to the right that still contains a one-over-one-light window. The building's entire original first story storefront has now been replaced by a modern one whose two smaller windows are surrounded by walls clad in board and batten and this entire story is now sheltered by a wood shake-clad pent roof.

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

This building was built in 1912 and it was to be the first part of a larger project developed by the Thomsen Bros. that would also have included a larger two-story building next door to the right housing an opera house that was not built.

Work is now under way on the first part of the block, which is to be used when completed as a bakery by Paul Van de Walle. This part of the building will be 22 by 80 feet in dimensions, two stories high and will also be of solid brick with plate glass front. Thomsen Bros. expect to have this part of the structure completed some time in August.⁵

The first occupant of this building's first story was a grocery store run by Henry De Bruin. The Thomsen Bros. were builders and contractors and they were the builders of this building.

315-17 Main Avenue

Fred Gabel Building

1915

This Queen Anne style double store building was built in 1915 and it is two-stories-tall, it has a rectilinear plan, and it measures 45-feet-wide by 100-feet-deep. The building has exterior walls clad in orange brick and its main façade faces north onto Main Avenue, it is symmetrical in design, and it is crowned by a corbelled brick parapet wall. The first story originally consisted of two large display windows that were placed at either end of this story and these were enframed by pilaster strips on their outer edges and by cast iron posts on their inner ones. Placed between these windows were the recessed entrance doors to the shops and in the center between them was an entrance door that led up to the second story. These elements are all still extant but the original display windows themselves have now been replaced with modern ones that have stone veneer bulkheads below them, the transoms above them are now covered over with modern materials, and the original entrance doors have now been modified and they are also modern in design.

The four-bay-wide second story, however, is still mostly intact. The two outer bays both contain single segmental-arched window openings that have concrete sills and these now contain modern aluminum sash double hung one-over-one-light windows. The two inner bays each contain a three-sided, hip-roofed oriel bay whose wider north-facing side contains a single one-over-one-light double hung aluminum sash window and whose two narrower sides also each contain smaller one-over-one-light double hung aluminum sash windows. In addition, the surfaces above and below these windows are also now clad in vertical vinyl siding. Nevertheless, even in its somewhat altered state this is still one of the district's more impressive buildings.

⁵ "Opera House for West Side." *Brown County Democrat*. June 7, 1912, p. 1.

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

This building apparently took the place of the larger one that the Thomsen Bros. had planned to build and the start of its construction was noted in the local newspaper.

The west side business district will have another substantial improvement during the summer. Fred Gabel and Charles Selle have purchased the 45½ foot lot on the south side of Main avenue west of the store building owned by former alderman John Thomsen, and it is intended immediately to begin the erection of a two story brick store and office building 45x100 feet in dimensions.⁶

The first story of this building originally housed stores and there were offices in the second story. By 1925, however, Sanborn-Perris maps show that the first story housed an automobile garage.

345 Main Avenue William Van Dyk Building 1933⁷

This two-story-tall, rectilinear plan, Twentieth Century Commercial Style building measures 25.5-feet-wide by 120-feet-deep. The building has exterior walls clad in variegated brick and its main façade faces north onto Main Avenue, it is asymmetrical in design, and it is crowned by a simple stepped brick parapet wall that features limestone coping. The first story consists of a storefront that has a centered, entrance door that is set into a deeply recessed vestibule having splayed sides and this entrance door is flanked on both sides by a large one-light display window placed above brick-clad bulkheads. Both the entrance and the display windows are framed by thin wood framing members but the upper portion of these elements is now hidden from view by a modern pent roof that spans the width of the façade just above the storefront. Otherwise, this entire storefront is still mostly intact today as is the recessed entrance door to the second story above, which is placed to the right of the storefront. The original second story of the façade is also still largely intact. This story is five-bays-wide and each bay contains a single window opening that contains a six-over-one-light double hung wood sash window. These windows are now protected by one-over-one-light double hung aluminum storm windows, but the openings themselves and their windows are all still intact.

351-53 Main Avenue Max L. Franc Building pre-1884/1923-1947

This one-story-tall, rectilinear plan, Twentieth Century Commercial Style double store building measures 45-feet-wide by 80-feet-deep. The building has exterior walls clad in dark brown brick and

⁶ "New Building for Main Avenue." *De Pere News*. June 16, 1915, p. 1.

⁷ City of De Pere Historic Real Estate Tax Assessment Rolls.

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its main façade faces north onto Main Avenue, it is symmetrical in design, and it is crowned by a tall slightly stepped brick parapet wall that features limestone coping and a centered limestone lozenge-shaped ornament.

The first story originally consisted of two large display windows placed at either end of this story, both of which also had paneled brick bulkheads below them. Located between these windows were the twin entrance doors to the shops, which were placed in a deeply recessed entrance vestibule whose splayed sides are themselves comprised of smaller display windows. While these elements are all still extant, the original display windows themselves have now been replaced with modern ones, the transoms above them are now covered over with modern materials, and the original entrance doors have now been replaced by metal and glass ones that are also modern in design.

The history of the building we see today is to some degree conjectural. Sanborn-Perris maps suggest that the right-hand (west) of this building may actually predate 1884. Whether this is true or not, it is certain that a one-story brick building of the same dimensions (22.5 by 80-feet) occupied this portion of the parcel by 1884. Similarly, Sanborn-Perris maps also show that a one-story brick building measuring 22.5-feet-wide by 40-feet-deep was built on the left-hand (east) part of this parcel between 1895 and 1900. It is therefore possible that one or both of these buildings is still partially extant but that their original facades were later removed and were replaced by the facade that is present today. These same maps also show that the present building, which consists of two 22.5 by 80-foot portions, was in place by 1947. While it is possible a new building was constructed between 1925 to 1947 evidence suggests that the present building came together gradually. The right-hand portion of this building, for instance, was always occupied by a meat market run by the Franc family and a 1923 newspaper item suggests that their half achieved its current appearance in that year.

Franc's meat market adjoining the monument works will have a large plate glass window. The entrance will be on the east end of the building, leaving the remainder for display purposes. The inside of the building is to be completely renovated and an office built in the front of the shop. Bert Beauregard has the contract.⁸

355 Main Avenue Van Gemert Marble Work 1914/1923

This excellent and unusual variant of the Twentieth Century Commercial style is one of the district's most notable buildings. This one-story-tall, rectilinear plan, 30-foot-wide by 120-foot-deep building was built to house a monument works and it originally had a display area in the front of the building

⁸ "Improvements on Main Avenue." *De Pere Journal-Democrat*. August 2, 1923, p. 1.

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Main Avenue Historic District
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between these pilasters is a first story storefront that consists of a deeply recessed, centered entrance vestibule whose splayed sides are comprised of small display windows. Larger three-light display windows that are held in place with metal frames flank this entrance vestibule on both sides and these windows have brick bulkheads below that are trimmed with dressed limestone. Both the display windows and the entrance are crowned by a limestone-faced lintel that has a limestone keystone in its center and which spans the full width of the facade between the framing pilasters.

The second story of the facade is three-bays-wide and the two outer bays both contain single window openings that have dressed limestone sills and eared limestone heads that are ornamented with keystones, while the wider center bay has an identical but longer sill and head and contains a pair of windows.¹¹ Located above these windows at the top of the facade is a molded limestone cornice supported by limestone brackets that spans the width of the facade between the pilasters. Above this is a shaped parapet wall having limestone coping and an oblong date stone that bears the date "1913" in its center.

The only change that has affected this facade has been the replacement of the original display windows with modern ones and the replacement of the second story windows with modern equivalents. Otherwise, this facade is still highly intact and in excellent condition.

The owner of this building, Louis E. Secor, began construction in 1912 to replace the frame building on the same site that housed his saloon business.

Louis Secor of the west side, has begun the rebuilding of his saloon building on Main avenue. He will build a 20 foot brick addition in the rear first, when this is completed he will tear down a 30 foot section adjoining and replace it with a brick structure. He plans to complete the rebuilding next year, when the forward section will be raised and a brick section built; the whole is to be two stories high.¹²

367 Main Avenue

Louis E. Secor Investment Building

1928

Fifteen years later, Louis Secor built a second building next to his original one as an investment property. This building is also two-stories-tall and rectilinear in plan and its main facade also faces north onto Main Avenue but is asymmetrical in design. The entire facade is faced in reddish brown brick and its first story consists of a storefront comprised of two display windows above a brick

¹¹ These openings now contain one-over-one-light double hung windows that are modern equivalents of the originals.

¹² *Brown County Democrat*. July 26, 1912, p. 1.

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Main Avenue Historic District
De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin

bulkhead that is placed to the right (west) of the deeply recessed entrance door vestibule that comprises the remainder of this story.¹³ There are two entrance doors in this vestibule. One is placed on the splayed side wall of the vestibule and it provides access to the building's first story. The other is placed on the flat (south) wall of the vestibule and it provides access to the second story.

The second story of the façade is three-bays-wide and each bay contains a window opening that has a brick sill and which now contains a modern one-over-one-light double hung window that is a modern equivalent of the original one.

The owner of this building, Louis E. Secor, began construction in 1928, and this was duly noted in the local newspaper.

Louis Secor's new brick store building on Main avenue is nearly completed. It is said that there will be a big business change in that section of the city when it is ready to be occupied.¹⁴

This building filled one of the few remaining vacant lots on the block when it was built.

371 Main Avenue Bank of West De Pere 1920

The former Bank of West De Pere building is another of the district's most notable buildings. This two-story-tall, rectilinear plan, 25-foot-wide by 50-foot-deep Neoclassical Revival style building has a symmetrically designed three-bay-wide main façade that faces north onto Main Avenue. This façade is faced in tan brick, it rests on a dressed limestone plinth foundation, it is enframed by broad, banded brick pilasters on either side that have stone bases and stepped stone capitals, and these pilasters visually help to support a broad limestone entablature that spans the entire width of the façade just above them. The three bays that are located between these pilasters are separated from each other by two less wide superposed classical elements. These elements have a first story that consists of a banded brick pilaster and a second story that consists of a fluted, engaged, limestone Tuscan Order column, the capital of which also appears to support the broad limestone entablature mentioned above. The left and right-hand bays that are framed by these elements are identical and each contains a window opening in their first story that has a dressed stone sill and head and a nearly identical window opening is also now located in the second story above. Historic photos, however, show that these second story window openings were originally much taller than those in the first story, but these have now been reduced in size and all four of these window openings now contain later one-over-one-light

¹³ These display windows are modern replacements for the originals and they are held in place by metal frames.

¹⁴ *De Pere Journal-Democrat*. October 11, 1928, p. 1.

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double hung windows.¹⁵ The wider middle bay contains the slightly recessed main entrance to the building in its first story and this entrance door opening is crowned by a triangular limestone pediment, while the second story above contains a wider window opening that has also been reduced in height and which originally contained a 30-light window. The entire façade is crowned by a tall brick parapet wall that is treated as a solid balustrade whose four pedestals correspond in width and placement to the pilasters and other elements that are located below.

Not surprisingly, the construction of this building was treated in some detail by the local newspaper when it opened.

The Bank of West De Pere will occupy its new building on Main avenue next Saturday. This was built especially for the bank and is one of the most substantial structures of the kind in this part of the state, as well as being of very attractive architecture. The photograph presented herewith gives on an idea of its exterior appearance, the front being of roughened light colored brick, with stone pillars being elevated above the sides of the entrance. All the windows are of the ribbed prismatic type, which gives a diffused light to the interior.¹⁶

Fortunately, the only changes that have affected the exterior of this building have been the replacement of the original windows and the reduction in size of the second story window openings. Otherwise, this building is still in excellent condition today.

377 Main Avenue Henry Strong Building pre-1883

The Henry Strong building is a two-story-tall, rectilinear plan, Italianate style-influenced Commercial Vernacular form building whose main block measures 25-feet-wide by 80-feet-deep and whose slightly shorter two-story rear wing measures 25-feet-wide by 40-feet-deep. Sanborn-Perris maps show that both portions of this building were built prior to 1883, and these have stone foundation walls and the walls that rest on these foundations are fashioned out of cream brick.

The building's main facade, which faces north onto Main Avenue, is asymmetrical in design and its original brick-clad second story has now been covered over with stucco. The first story of the façade has an entrance door placed to the left (east) that services the second story, but most of its width consists of a storefront that has a deeply recessed entrance on the left that is flanked on the right (west)

¹⁵ "Fine New Bank Building." *De Pere Journal-Democrat*. July 29, 1920, p. 9 (illustrated). The photo in this article shows that the first story windows originally contained 16 lights while the much taller second story ones each contained 28 lights.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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by a large one-light display window. Thick masonry columns that have now been covered in stucco enframe the display window and the entrance. Almost all the elements that make up the storefront today are modern, but the openings that they fill are original. The second story of this façade is three-bays-wide and each bay contains a single semi-circular-arched window opening that contains a one-over-one-light double hung window. The original windows have now been replaced with later one-over-one-light double hung ones, but the openings themselves, which have dressed stone sills and corbelled brick heads that have now been covered in stucco, are still intact.

The Strong building occupies the southeast corner that was created by the intersection of Main Avenue and Fourth Street and consequently it has an exposed west-facing side elevation. This elevation is composed of both the taller main block and the shorter rear wing. The first story of the taller portion has only a single semi-circular-arched window opening that is placed to the left of a side entrance door. The second story, however, is seven-bays-wide and each of these bays contains a single semi-circular-arched window opening that is identical to the ones found on the second story of the building's main facade. The first story of the rear wing is four-bays-wide, and the second bay from the right (south) consists of a single segmental-arched door opening that has now been bricked shut. The other three bays, however, each contain semi-circular-arched window openings, although the original windows themselves have now been replaced with one-light windows, and the rear wing's four-bay-wide second story contains four more of these same windows.

Sanborn-Perris maps show that both portions of this building were built prior to 1883. The owner, Henry Strong, was a well-known Green Bay banker, and it is likely that this building was built by him as an investment. The second story of this building consists of a meeting hall that was occupied for many years by the Temple of Honor, a national temperance organization, and this organization actually owned the building for many years and rented out the first story to a druggist.

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Main Avenue Historic District
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Significance:

The Main Avenue Historic District is a small, architecturally significant commercial district that is located in the historic core of that portion of the city of De Pere that is situated on the west side of the Fox River. The district was first identified by the De Pere Intensive Architectural Survey, which was undertaken in 2000-2001, as a potential historic district having local significance under National Register (NR) Criterion C (Architecture).¹⁷ Research was undertaken to assess the potential for nominating the district to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) utilizing the NR significance area of Architecture, a theme that is also identified in the State of Wisconsin's *Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP)*.¹⁸ This research centered on evaluating the resources within the district utilizing the Queen Anne style, Neoclassical Revival style, Twentieth Century Commercial style, Contemporary Style, and Commercial Vernacular form subsections of the Architectural Styles study unit of the CRMP. The results of this research are detailed below and show that the Main Avenue Historic District is locally significant under NR Criterion C as an architecturally significant collection of historic commercial buildings that together constitute a well-defined and visually distinct geographic and historic entity.

The Main Avenue Historic District contains eighteen adjacent historic commercial buildings located on the south side of Main Avenue, an east-west-running thoroughfare that is one of De Pere's principal historic commercial thoroughfares. The district is comprised of 14 contributing resources and 4 non-contributing ones. All of the contributing resources were built between ca.1883 and ca.1950.¹⁹ The contributing resources are good, typical examples of the styles and vernacular form listed above, and most of them have designs that were probably supplied by the persons who built them. The district is believed to be of architectural significance (Criterion C) because it contains the only intact historic streetscape of late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings that remains in the historic business center of the west side of the city of De Pere. Individually, the buildings in the district are good representative examples of their respective architectural styles and vernacular form designs but they have a collective

¹⁷ Heggland, Timothy F. *City of De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin: Intensive Survey Report*. [De Pere, Wis.: City of De Pere, 2001.] Copy on file at the Division of Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

¹⁸ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.) *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*. Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Vol. 2, (Architecture) pp. 2-15, 2-18, 2-37, 3-10.

¹⁹ The period of significance extends from ca.1883 to ca.1950 and it is bounded by the known construction dates of most of the contributing resources in the district and by the suspected building dates of some others. The buildings that are shown as having been built before 1883, for instance, appear on the earliest Sanborn-Perris map (1884) and on the earliest surviving De Pere Tax Rolls (1883), but their actual dates of construction have not been found. Others appear to have been built or remodeled between 1910 and 1950 based on their stylistic attributes, but again, the exact date is also not known. Records indicate that the district had assumed much of its current appearance by 1950.

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significance that is even greater than the merit they possess individually. While other historic 19th and 20th century commercial buildings are scattered throughout the downtown area of the west side of the city, most have now been greatly altered by modernization and others are found either in isolation or in streetscapes that have been partially depleted by demolition and modernization. Consequently, the buildings in the district now constitute the sole remaining intact concentration of historic commercial buildings on the west side of De Pere and since intact surviving streetscapes of such buildings are rapidly nearing extinction in the changing economic and social reality that characterizes the downtowns of Wisconsin's cities today, the preservation of the district's buildings is essential to the future of this portion of De Pere's historic downtown.

History:

A detailed history of the city of De Pere and its built resources is embodied in the *City of De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin: Intensive Survey Report*, printed in 2001. Consequently, the historic context that follows deals primarily with the history of the district itself and with the immediate surrounding area.

The city of De Pere has the distinction of being one of the oldest points of European-American settlement in Wisconsin. The first European to see it was, in all probability, Jean Nicolet in 1634, who claimed the surrounding territory for France. In time, Nicolet was followed by two Jesuit missionaries, Fathers Allouez and Andre, who established a mission at the first rapids of the Fox River in 1670. In 1671 the fathers erected a chapel and residence on the east shore of the river, which became their headquarters, and these were the first buildings that were constructed on the future site of today's city. In 1675 this chapel burned and several new, more substantial log structures, including a church, were built in its place. This mission, known as St. Francis Xavier Mission at Rapids des Peres, lasted for almost twelve years but was burned by the Indians in 1687. The subsequent history of this place was then subsumed into the larger history of the French and English contests for supremacy in the region followed by the English and American ones.²⁰

It was not until the creation of the military road system in 1832 in what was soon to become the Territory of Wisconsin that interest in the possibilities of utilizing the rapids at De Pere began to stir interest. The construction of the first of these roads from Fort Howard on the Fox River at Green Bay to Fort Crawford on the Mississippi River at Prairie Du Chien established the first road across the

²⁰ Maes, Matthew J. *The History of Brown County and De Pere, Wisconsin*. [De Pere, Wis.: St. Norbert College, 1975], *Brown County Democrat* article on April 3, 1914, p. 9 and April 10, 1914, p. 9. (Publication includes articles ... originally published in the *Brown County Democrat*.)

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territory and brought wagon and foot traffic up and down the river and past the future site of De Pere. But this opening up of the region was of only limited value to any economically significant movement of goods, and hopes fastened instead on improving the Fox River, which was navigable for much of its length but needed to be linked with the Wisconsin River in order to become a link between the Mississippi and the Great Lakes.

Thus, like most other early Wisconsin communities, the city of De Pere owes its existence to its proximity to water, which provided the state's first settlers with transportation routes, a reliable and easily accessible source of water for drinking, and the only readily available means of generating power for industrial purposes before steam power became wide spread. De Pere is situated on both banks of the Fox River at a point located some five miles south of the mouth of the river, which empties into Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Because there were considerable rapids at this location, further navigation upstream was impossible in the days before a lock system and canals were developed. While work was commencing elsewhere on this Fox-Wisconsin rivers waterway, others were laying claim to the heavily forested land that surrounded the site of what was to become De Pere.

In 1835, the De Pere Hydraulic Co. was formed and one of its first acts was to purchase a 100 acre plat of land on the east bank of the river abutting the rapids. A portion of this land was then platted into lots, which was called the Plat of the Town of De Pere, a contraction of the French "Des Peres." This plat, which is the original plat of that portion of today's city of De Pere that lies on the east side of the river, is bounded roughly by John Street to the North, Ontario Street to the east, Lewis Street to the south, and the Fox River to the west.

The following year the company started construction of a dam above the rapids that could be used to tap the water power potential of the river, and when the dam was completed in 1837, the future growth of the city seemed assured. This growth did not materialize immediately, however, because the company lacked the resources to harness the water power potential and the situation was exacerbated when the dam washed out in 1847. It was only when a new dam was built in the following year that real efforts were made to harness the resulting water power for industrial purposes and it is from this date that the real growth of the future city begins.

By 1850 the population of the village had grown to 500 and another event of enormous importance for inhabitants on both sides of the river took place in the same year. This was the beginning of the construction of the first bridge across the river just below the dam. This was a toll bridge and it was lightly constructed but it was still the first bridge and it provided a vital transportation link whose importance would continue to grow in the years to come.

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The earliest commercial activity that took place within and around what today is the city of De Pere was conducted by merchants catering to traffic moving up and down the old Military Roads on the east and west banks of the Fox River. It was not until the first dam was built across the rapids at De Pere in 1836-1837, and especially after the first bridge connecting the east and west sides of the river was built across the top of the dam in 1850-1851, that commercial activity in De Pere really began in earnest. Because this bridge and its successors were the only ones in the entire area that crossed the river for a number of years thereafter, land near the bridge site on both sides of the river quickly evolved into hubs of both industrial and retail commercial activity.

In 1852, Chicagoan Robert Ritchie and his brother-in-law, Andrew Reid, built a saw mill (non-extant) at the west end of the bridge. Three years later Capt. Elias Sorenson started a shipyard (non-extant) on the west bank of the river north of the bridge. The following year, a saw mill and agricultural implement factory (non-extant) was started by W. O. Kingsley just south of the bridge on the east bank of the river. The really big news in 1856, however, was the arrival of the first ship to make the voyage up the newly completed lock and canal system of the Fox/Wisconsin. This was the "Aquila," which had begun its journey in Pittsburgh and journeyed down the Ohio, then up the Mississippi to the Wisconsin and on up to Portage, Wisconsin, and then up the Upper and Lower Fox to De Pere and Green Bay.²¹

The following year, Mrs. A. B. Williams reported that De Pere had improved since she had left in 1850. "The population all told was about 400. Wilcox & Wager had a flouring mill. There were two saw mills, one owned by Ritchie and Reid and the other by Frank Thompson; four stores kept by Dominicus Jordan, C. R. Merrill, Mr. Kelsley and Mr. Wager, respectively."²² Also in 1857, De Pere (on the east bank) was incorporated as the Village of De Pere.

Nearly all of the surviving historic buildings that are associated with the history of commerce on both sides of the river in De Pere date from the late 1870s onward and almost all of these buildings are now and were historically located in three distinct areas of present day De Pere that together form the historic downtown core of today's city. Two of these areas are located at the east and west ends of the recently rebuilt Claude Allouez Bridge, which is the modern successor to the first bridge that linked the two sides of the river. The third is located along the first five westernmost blocks of George Street, which extends eastward from the east end of the bridge. This downtown core grew up where it did because of its location at the ends of the bridges that have spanned the Fox River at this point and

²¹ Maes, Matthew J. *The History of Brown County and De Pere, Wisconsin*. [De Pere, Wis.: St. Norbert College, 1975], *Brown County Democrat* article on July 10, 1914, p. 10. (Publication includes articles ... originally published in the *Brown County Democrat*.)

²² *Ibid*, *Brown County Democrat* article on February 12, 1915, p. 7.

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which unite the communities of West De Pere on the west bank of the river and De Pere on the east bank. Proximity to the Fox River was the critical factor in the establishment of both of these communities. The mouth of the Fox River empties into Green Bay and Lake Michigan and De Pere is located five miles south of this mouth at a place on the river where sizable rapids made further navigation upstream impossible in the early 1800s. During this period shipping on nearby Lake Michigan was the only reliable means of transporting large quantities of goods and large numbers of people to and from this area in the period before adequate overland roads and, later, railroads were developed. Consequently, that portion of the river between these rapids and Lake Michigan gradually developed into an important Great Lakes port. Even more important was the fact that the rapids of the Fox River at De Pere was the most important potential source of water power in the area in the 1840s-1860s and was thus the logical place for the construction of a dam and of saw mills, flour and grist mills, and other industries that could make use of the power that could be generated by mechanically harnessing the now somewhat regulated flow of the river.

The combination of transportation access and readily available water power made the rapidly growing communities on both sides of the former rapids economically viable. This combination also resulted in commercial districts being developed at both ends of the bridge and along the main roads that extended out of these two areas and into outlying areas that were in need of the resources that De Pere was increasingly able to supply. The most important of these roads on the east bank of the river was Broadway. What made this particular north-south-running road important was the fact that it was already the principal road running north to Green Bay from points to the south on that side of the river. Thus, Broadway was already an important local and regional thoroughfare when the first bridge was built at De Pere and the place where Broadway connected with the east end of the east-west-running bridge thus became a natural place for commerce to develop. This new commercial development was not limited just to Broadway. Commercial development also began to extend eastward from Broadway along both sides of the east-west-running George Street because the western terminus of George Street was the east end of the bridge. Consequently, the point of intersection of George Street with the already existing north-south-running Broadway became the focal point for commercial activity on the east bank of the river.

Similar development occurred at the west end of the bridge as well and for identical reasons. Here too, several already existing and newly created roads quickly came to focus on the area near the end of the new bridge. The most immediately important of these roads was the east-west-running Main Avenue, and what made this particular thoroughfare important was the fact that its eastern terminus was the west end of the bridge. Consequently, commercial development developed around this point as well, and along the three-block length of Main Ave. In 1861, a new bridge was built across the Fox by the Village of De Pere and by the Town of Lawrence on the west side of the river to replace the original

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one. In the following year an event of even greater importance occurred when the tracks of the Chicago & NorthWestern Railroad reached West De Pere on their way up the west bank of the river to Fort Howard. The importance of this event cannot be overestimated because by this time railroads were rapidly eroding the importance and advantages of river and lake transportation and a position on a railroad line was becoming imperative for a community that hoped to grow and prosper. Not surprisingly, the place where these tracks crossed Main Ave. further anchored the commercial district that was already growing up along the street.

The period from the end of the Civil War in 1865 until the financial panic of 1873 was a boom period for the communities on both sides of the river. By 1870, the census of that year showed that the population of De Pere on the east side of the river had risen to 2800 and on the west side to 875. As a consequence, the community on the west side petitioned to be incorporated as the Village of West De Pere, which was approved in that same year. In 1871, the Village of De Pere on the east side received a railroad of its own when the tracks of the Milwaukee Northern Railroad (later the Milwaukee Road) reached the community on their way up to Green Bay, and, as had happened on the west side, property owners on the east side responded with a flurry of platting activity of their own. A Bird's Eye View of the two villages, published in 1871, shows that the settled part of the Village of De Pere on the east side of the river was then bounded by the river to the west, Fulton St. to the north, Huron Street to the east, and Chicago Street to the south, while the settled portion of West De Pere was bounded by the river on the east and north, the C. & NW RR tracks on the west, and Butler Street to the south. Both communities had public schools, there were six churches (Irish, French, and German Catholic, Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian), three hotels (California House, National House, and Village House), and three large industries (De Pere Iron Works, Fox River Iron Co., and First National Iron Co.).²³

By 1875, the two villages of De Pere and West De Pere had evolved into the principal trading center of the area around it and their two well-established business cores were both surrounded by residential plats. The architectural styles found in De Pere in the mid-1870s were typical of other communities of the day. Older commercial buildings tended to be built in the Greek Revival style or were vernacular expressions of it and were mostly built of wood, as were the village's first houses. By the 1860s, however, some of De Pere's older commercial buildings began to be replaced by larger brick examples whose designs were influenced by the newly fashionable Italianate style.

²³ *Bird's Eye View of De Pere, Wisconsin*. Madison: J. J. Stoner, publisher, 1871.

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In 1876, the following description of De Pere was contained in an advertisement for land that was owned by the De Pere Co.:

The waterpower is made by the first dam on the Fox River of the Green Bay & Mississippi Canal Company. Depere [*sic*] and West Depere [*sic*] lie on opposite sides of the river, and are connected by a commodious bridge of fifteen hundred feet in length. Their population numbers over four thousand people. There are eight churches, three public and one private school; four furnaces for smelting iron ore; one extensive railroad car manufactory and iron works; one machine shop; three flour mills; two large wooden ware factories; three shingle mills; four saw mills; two sash and door factories; one stave factory; one hub and spoke factory; five wagon ships; seven smitheries; a steam forge and various other manufactories. The Milwaukee and Northern Railroad runs on the river bank through Depere, [*sic*] and the Chicago and Northwestern Depot is at West Depere [*sic*]. The Goodrich line of steamers make regular trips between Depere [*sic*] and Chicago, and the Buffalo line takes freight from our wharves to Buffalo and intermediate ports.²⁴

And yet, larger forces were then in operation that would have a substantial effect on the future of the two villages. By 1880, the combined populations of the nearby twin cities of Green Bay and Fort Howard (also located on the east and west sides of the Fox River) was 10,500, more than double the 3824 of the two De Peres, and this difference in relative size has continued until the present day. The reasons for this difference in size and rate of growth reflected many things, of course, and among them was the simple fact that the initial advantages that had led to the creation and subsequent growth of De Pere had slowly dwindled. By 1880, De Pere's water power advantage was gradually being offset by the construction of new coal-fired steam boilers. Green Bay also reaped the advantage of being the final destination point of all the land and water transportation routes that passed through De Pere. In addition, Green Bay's position at the mouth of the Fox River gave it advantages as a port that could not be matched by a site further upstream. As a consequence, the rate of De Pere's population growth gradually began to level off. Nevertheless, the growth that had occurred up to this point was sufficient to ensure that the commercial cores that had been established in the two villages would survive and would continue to grow and evolve.

The first commercial buildings built in what would become the Main Avenue Historic District were probably erected as soon as the first bridge was built over the river and they were almost all small one and occasionally two-story wood frame buildings. Gradually, a few brick buildings joined these wood frame pioneers and by 1880, much of the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue was lined with one and two story commercial buildings.

²⁴ Maes. Op. Cit., March 5, 1915, p. 10.

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By 1884, the Sanborn-Perris map of De Pere published in that year showed that the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue contained 14 buildings, all of which housed saloons and restaurants, retail stores, and other commercial establishments, and although only four of these buildings were built out of brick, most were two-stories-tall.²⁵ The north side of the same block, however, could claim only ten buildings, only two of which were clad in brick, and while these buildings also housed commercial establishments, they were typically smaller and were mostly just one-story in height.

In 1883, the two villages were both incorporated as the city of De Pere (east side) and the city of Nicolet (west side). Nicolet subsequently changed its name back to West De Pere in 1887 and the two cities finally agreed to merge on August 7, 1889, and became known as the City of De Pere. Growth on both sides of the river was slow during the 1890s. By 1890, the Sanborn-Perris map of De Pere published in that year showed that the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue still contained 14 buildings, although one of these was a two-story brick replacement (301 Main Avenue) for the one-story frame building that had previously occupied this parcel. The Sanborn-Perris map of De Pere published in 1895 showed that in that year the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue still contained 14 buildings, but again one of these was a new two-story brick replacement (331 Main Avenue) for the one-story frame building that had previously occupied the same parcel.

By 1900, De Pere's overall population had dropped slightly to 4038, and the city was entering a more mature phase of its history. Changes in the lumber industry that had previously been of such importance to De Pere were dictating that certain kinds of manufacturing that had once been done in factories like those in De Pere could now be done more efficiently in plants located nearer to the forests themselves, forests that had largely been depleted in Brown County. In addition, other types of manufacturing that had once been done in the city were now being done by much larger firms with regional and even national markets. As a result, industrial production was slowly beginning to lose its importance in the economic life of the city.

The Sanborn-Perris map of De Pere published in 1900 showed that by then the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue contained 16 buildings, and again one of these was a new brick replacement (337 Main Avenue) for the frame building that had previously occupied the parcel. The slow growth that the district experienced at this time can partially be explained by a development that occurred in 1903 that benefited the citizens of De Pere in general, but had a less pleasant effect on the city's merchants. This was the granting of a streetcar franchise to the Knox Construction Co. on March 23, 1903, which resulted in two

²⁵ Four of these buildings are still extant today, although one has now had its main façade modernized and another, the district's only remaining wood building (331 Main Ave.), is now non-contributing. There were also seven vacant lots on the south side of the block in 1884 and twice that number on the north side.

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lines being constructed to the city, one of which ran through a loop on the east side and the other through the city on the west side.²⁶ These lines connected De Pere with the city of Green Bay to the north and the city of Kaukauna to the south. The lines gave the citizens of De Pere ready access to goods and services they had not had before and also made it possible for them to work in places that had hitherto been located too far away to be realistic options. This last fact was of enormous importance because it was one of the facts of life during the period before automobile ownership became common that most persons needed to live near their work place if some form of public transit was not available. Once streetcars became available, however, the possible range within which one could live and commute to work was expanded significantly, a factor that also tended to benefit the larger cities on the lines such as Green Bay, where more employment opportunities were available. The streetcar line also greatly expanded the number of places where one could shop, a fact that also tended to work to the disadvantage of local merchants in smaller communities such as De Pere.

De Pere's population increased only from 4038 to 4477 between 1900 and 1910 and the prosperity of the city gradually plateaued in the subsequent decade. Most of the building activity that took place during the 1910s was residential construction, rather than commercial development. And yet, if change came to the district only gradually, it came nevertheless, as the ever increasing number of larger brick buildings demonstrated. In 1914, for example, when the next Sanborn-Perris map of De Pere was published, the new map showed that the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue contained 18 buildings by that time, ten of which were now built out of brick.

In the next decade, De Pere's population grew no faster, from 5165 in 1920 to just 5521 in 1930, and this decade was even less lively in terms of new construction than the one that had preceded it. Even so, the evolution of the district continued and, by 1925, that year's Sanborn-Perris map showed that the 300 block now contained twenty buildings, twelve of which were built out of brick.²⁷

By 1940, De Pere's population had grown by 13% to 6373, but this growth was generated by external rather than internal factors. The story of De Pere's development since the beginning of World War II has been similar, although the rate of population growth since then has been much faster. The population in 1950 being 8146, 10,045 in 1960, 13,309 in 1970, and 14,892 in 1980. As of 2000, De Pere had a population of 20,559, but the great bulk of the growth that the city has experienced since World War II can be attributed to the general growth of the entire Green Bay metropolitan area, of which De Pere is now an integral part.

²⁶ McDonald, Forrest. *Let There be Light: The Electric Utility Industry in Wisconsin, 1881-1955*. Madison: The American History Research Center, 1957, pp. 72-73 and 150-152.

²⁷ By 1925, there were only two vacant lots remaining on the block.

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By 1953, the Main Avenue Historic District had acquired most of its present appearance.²⁸ Fortunately for the district, very few additional commercial buildings were built in this portion of the city between 1953 and 2000. Since then, however, several of the city blocks that surround the district have been leveled and new construction is now radically changing the appearance of this area.

Despite the changes that have been wrought by a 125 years of continuous development, the west side of De Pere still retains a small core of intact historic commercial buildings that were constructed, for the most part, on the 300 block of Main Avenue. Eighteen of these buildings now constitute the Main Avenue Historic District, which is now the only intact grouping of such buildings remaining in this part of the city. These buildings were an important part of the historic business core of this part of De Pere and they bear witness to the way in which this core has evolved since the 1880s. Besides their collective physical significance, these buildings have also been occupied by some of the more important commercial enterprises that existed in this part of De Pere during the period of significance. These enterprises have included hardware stores, general stores, drugstores, grocery stores, saloons, restaurants, banks, meat markets, and other usages, all of which were once central to the commercial and social life of this part of De Pere and of the surrounding area. Happily, these buildings are still largely intact today, they are still occupied by local businesses, and several of them are now well into their second century of useful service to the community.

Architecture

The Main Avenue Historic District was identified by the De Pere Intensive Survey as one of the areas in De Pere that is most worthy of being listed in the NRHP. It is being nominated to the NRHP under Criterion C for its local significance because it contains the only intact historic streetscape of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century commercial buildings remaining in the historic business center of that portion of the larger city of De Pere that is located on the west side of the Fox River. Individually, the contributing buildings in the district are representative examples of Queen Anne style, Neoclassical Revival style, Twentieth Century Commercial style, and Commercial Vernacular form designs. Collectively, the buildings in the district have a significance that is greater than the merit they possess individually. While other smaller groups of historic period commercial buildings are located adjacent to the district, the integrity of these groups has been compromised by demolition, by the inclusion of later modern buildings that have replaced demolished historic ones, and by the alteration and modernization of many of the historic resource in these groups. In addition, the significance of the

²⁸ The updated Sanborn-Perris map for 1953 shows that only two of the buildings on the south side of the 300 block of Main Avenue were still built out of wood by that date and only one of these now survives.

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district is further enhanced by the generally high degree of integrity and the well maintained condition of its resources.

The contributing buildings in the Main Avenue Historic District are all clad in brick and they consist of three Commercial Vernacular form one and two-story buildings that were built between ca.1883 and 1900; two two-story Queen Anne style buildings built between 1913 and 1915; seven one and two-story Twentieth Century Commercial style buildings built between 1913 and ca.1950; and a single fine Neoclassical Revival style building built in 1920.²⁹

Commercial Vernacular (ca.1850-1910)

Simply designed commercial buildings built between 1850 and 1910 are called Commercial Vernacular Form buildings. These buildings are usually two or three stories-tall, although one and four story examples are also found. In multi-story examples, the first floor is given over to retail space and the upper floors are often used for apartments, although other commercial uses such as offices are also common in upper floors. A typical original feature of such designs is a large ground floor show window(s) and frequently transom windows placed above the show window help to light the ground floor. Upper stories usually have simple multiple window openings which are treated identically on buildings of the simplest design. Commercial Vernacular Form buildings were often joined together by party walls, though many free-standing examples exist. Unless a building occupies a corner site or is free-standing, decoration is usually limited to the main facade. A visually emphatic cornice featuring one or more decorative treatments, such as brick corbelling, wooden moldings, and a stamped metal frieze usually terminates the main facade and the only other decoration is usually a decorative cornice or iron I-beam above the first floor display window(s). Doors leading to both the ground floor and the upper floors are simple and are generally of paneled wood with a single window. Commercial Vernacular Form buildings are most often built of brick although both wood and stone examples are also found. While the mixing of two or more materials in the wall cladding of an individual building is sometimes seen, most examples usually feature just one material.

Nineteenth century examples of the Commercial Vernacular form are taller and narrower than their twentieth century successors, which are considered to be examples of the Twentieth Century Commercial Style, and they are sometimes somewhat more elaborately ornamented.

²⁹ The single contributing building that is not enumerated here is the Thomsen Building at 313 Main Ave., which began life in 1912 as a Queen Anne style building. Later, however, this building lost its second story oriel bay window and it now has a Commercial Vernacular appearance.

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Three of the contributing buildings in the district are examples of this form. One of these was built prior to 1883, the Henry Strong Building (377 Main Ave.); one, the Frank DeBoth Building (301 Main Ave.), was built in 1887; and one, the G. H. Salter Building (337 Main Ave.) was built in 1900.³⁰

Queen Anne (1880-1910)

The district also contains two good examples of Queen Anne style commercial buildings. The Queen Anne style, as used for commercial buildings, was much more likely to approximate the appearance of contemporary English models than was the case with residential designs. Wisconsin examples of Queen Anne style commercial buildings are generally from one to three stories tall, have exterior walls which are usually constructed of brick, have either brick or stone trim, feature period revival style ornamentation that is sometimes of English origin, and have exterior elevations that feature bay windows or oriel windows placed above the first floor and corner towers that are either full height or treated as oriel bays.

The district contains two late examples of Queen Anne style commercial buildings: the John Pfiffer Building (305 Main Ave.), built in 1913; and the Fred Gabel Building (315-17 Main Ave.), built in 1915, both of which feature the second story oriel bay windows that are a signature characteristic of the style.

Twentieth Century Commercial Style (1910-1935)

The Twentieth Century Commercial Style is the most frequently observed of all styles applied to commercial buildings built in the early part of the twentieth century. Unlike other styles that were applied to the smaller commercial buildings of the period, this one was generally utilitarian in design and it is found in both small and large cities throughout the state. Examples range from small one-story single storefront buildings to large two and three story, multi-unit commercial blocks.

Unlike the Commercial Vernacular form buildings that were built to house similar commercial enterprises in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century equivalent is broader and has less vertical emphasis. The style is characterized by a relatively unornamented, two-dimensional facade and a broad rectangular massing. Buildings are generally executed in brick, but other masonry and tile cladding is also found. A stepped or shaped parapet, often topped with a stone or concrete coping, is a

³⁰ It is believed that two of the other contributing buildings in the district started life as Commercial Vernacular buildings as well. These buildings are the Max L. Franc building at 351-353 Main Avenue and the building at 375 Main Avenue, both of which were later remodeled and given more contemporary Twentieth Century Commercial Style facades.

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common feature. Ornamentation is generally limited to the use of contrasting materials or to simple geometric patterns made of brick in the cornice and simply ornamented storefronts, occasionally topped with a prism glass transom. Typical examples will have rectangular panels in the cornice outlined by soldier or header brick courses, the insets of which are sometimes detailed with decorative brickwork in herringbone or basket weave patterns. Small insets of tile, stone, or concrete in diamond, square, or other simple shapes often form secondary accents.

The popularity of the Twentieth Century Commercial Style may be due to the simplicity of its design and ease of construction. A secondary factor was its versatility in adapting to the new types and needs of commercial enterprises emerging in the early years of the century such as automobile showrooms and department stores. As the century progressed, examples become plainer in design, perhaps reflecting other modernistic architectural influences.

Nearly all the De Pere examples of this style are contained within the Main Avenue Historic District and these include: the Jacob Bros. Building (339-41 Main Ave.), built in 1940-1950; the William Van Dyk Building (345 Main Ave.), built in 1933; the Max L. Franc Building (353 Main Ave.), built prior to 1883 and remodeled between 1923 and 1947; the Van Gemert Marble Works Building (355 Main Ave.), built in 1914 and remodeled in 1923; the two Louis Secor Buildings (365 and 367 Main Ave.), built in 1913 and 1928, respectively; and the building located at 375 Main Ave., which was also built prior to 1883 and remodeled between 1930 and 1950.

Neoclassical Revival (1895-1935)

A style which became especially popular for public, institutional, and commercial buildings after the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, the Neo-Classical Revival style was classical in inspiration and planning and stressed symmetry and the use of classical detailing. This detailing typically includes such characteristic elements as porticos whose roofs are supported by classical order columns, and symmetrically balanced windows and doors. The use of columns is all but ubiquitous in Neo-Classical design and they may be either freestanding or used as engaged design elements such as pilasters and pilaster strips. Public examples of the style were usually executed in stone or brick wall cladding and feature materials designed to express a feeling of monumentality and permanence. Not surprisingly, this style was often chosen by financial institutions and indeed, the only example in the district is the Bank of West De Pere (371 Main Ave.), built in 1920, which is almost certainly the work of an as yet unidentified architect.

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Builders

The great majority of the historically and architecturally significant buildings in De Pere and elsewhere were designed either wholly or in part by the persons who built them and this was true of the buildings in the Main Avenue Historic District as well. These designers played an important role in the creation of the built environment and the best of them are now considered to be fully deserving of the term "master" as it is used in National Register Criterion C. These persons possessed widely differing skills and design capabilities, but were generally distinguished from those persons calling themselves architects by their less formal education and design training and by their greater degree of physical involvement in the building process. The first builders were usually skilled or semi-skilled carpenters and masons whose design sense developed out of the direct experience they acquired working with traditional building methods and designs. Prior to 1850, this experience was much the same for both builders and for those persons then calling themselves architects in Wisconsin. As a result, builders proved to be more than adequate designers for the vast majority of buildings built in this early period of Wisconsin's history, a period whose chief need was for shelter and functional utility. Even as the needs of society became more complex and buildings larger and much more numerous, builders were still able to satisfy the great majority of client's requests by resorting to pattern books for design ideas and to an ever-growing number of mail order catalogs which made available an endless variety of increasingly complex architectural details. In its essentials this system continues to exist today and most residences in particular are still built "from plans" much as they were in the nineteenth century.

The earliest builders in De Pere were probably mostly itinerant craftsmen whose portable skills gave them great flexibility in choosing where to locate. Many of these persons probably stayed in De Pere just long enough to finish a job and get paid. As De Pere grew, however, it became possible for some of these men to move from job to job within the community and become permanent residents. Unfortunately, researching buildings constructed in Wisconsin's smaller cities seldom produces the identities of the designers and/or builders of these buildings, and this proved to be true for all but one of the buildings within the Main Avenue Historic District as well. Mostly this is due to the fact that the newspapers in De Pere seldom included such information when noting that a building was under construction, regardless of the building's size or the importance of its owner.

Conclusion:

The Main Avenue Historic District is being nominated to the NRHP for its architectural significance because it represents a coherent whole that is clearly visually distinct from surrounding neighborhoods and because it contains individual buildings that are representative of architectural styles and vernacular forms that were prevalent in similar commercial districts elsewhere in De Pere and in the

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state during the period of significance, which spans the years from ca.1883 and ca.1950. All but one of these buildings is clad in either brick or stone, and they range from one to two stories in height. The district's broad period of significance means that its resources also display a variety of styles, and these are indicative of the changes in taste that occurred during the period of significance. The district contains the largest remaining concentration of intact historic late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings on the west side of the Fox River in De Pere, and most were replacements for older, smaller wooden ones that were located on the same sites. Today, the district contains the most intact collection of historic commercial buildings remaining in the western half of De Pere and their survival is a testament to the continuing relevance of the district in the city's commercial life.

Preservation Activity:

The Main Avenue Historic District has been fortunate in that the many changes that have affected the commercial life of De Pere in recent years have left the buildings in the district largely intact. In addition, the De Pere Historic Preservation Commission has been very active in educating property owners of historic resources in De Pere as to the importance and value of historic preservation, including acting as the sponsor of this nomination.

Archeological Potential

The extent of any archeological remains in the district is conjectural at this time. It is known that there were previous buildings on some of these lots and it is also known that the district's buildings were built on or over the foundations of these previous buildings. Thus, it is possible that some historic archeological remains may still be extant despite subsequent construction activity. No information about possible prehistoric remains in this area was found in the course of this research. It is likely, however, that any remains of pre-European cultures located within the district would have been greatly disturbed by the building activity associated with the subsequent development of the area.

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Acknowledgment

This project has been funded with the assistance of a grant-in-aid from the Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended. Historic Preservation grants-in-aid are administered in Wisconsin in conjunction with the National Register of Historic Places program by the Division of Historic Preservation of the Wisconsin Historical Society. However, the contents and opinions contained in this nomination do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the National Park Service or the Wisconsin Historical Society.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The district boundary begins at a point on the south curbline of Main Ave. that corresponds to the NE corner of the lot associated with 301 Main Ave. The line then continues W along said curbline to the NW corner of the lot associated with 377 Main Ave., turns 90° and continues S along the W side lot line of 377 Main Ave. to the SW corner of the lot, then turns 90° and runs E along the rear lot lines of 377, 375, 371, 367, 365, 363, 355, 351-53, 345, 339-41, 337, 321, 327, 321, 315-17, 313, 305, and 301 Main Ave. to a point on the west curbline of Third St. that corresponds to the SE corner of the lot associated with 301 Main Ave. The line then turns 90° and continues N along the E side of said lot to the NE corner of the lot and the POB.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundaries of the district enclose all the land that is historically associated with the district's resources. The buildings on the opposite west side of the 300 block of Main Avenue were originally comparable to those in the district in terms of both age and design, but this streetscape has now been considerably altered by the demolition of several of these historic buildings and by the modernization of others and while there are a few buildings in this block that retain integrity, the block as a whole does not.

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Items a-d are the same for photos 1 - 8

Photo 1

- a) Main Avenue Historic District
- b) De Pere, Brown County, WI
- c) Timothy F. Heggland, June 2008
- d) Wisconsin Historical Society
- e) General View with 301 Main Ave. in the foreground. View looking SW
- f) Photo 1 of 8

Photo 8

- e) General View with 377 Main Ave. in the foreground. View looking SE
- f) Photo 8 of 8

Photo 2

- e) 301 & 305 Main Ave. View looking S
- f) Photo 2 of 8

Photo 3

- e) 313 & 315-17 Main Ave. View Looking S
- f) Photo 3 of 8

Photo 4

- e) 339-41 & 345 Main Ave. View looking S
- f) Photo 4 of 8

Photo 5

- e) 355 Main Ave. View looking S
- f) Photo 5 of 8

Photo 6

- e) 365 & 367 Main Ave. View looking S
- f) Photo 6 of 8

Photo 7

- e) 371 Main Ave. View looking S
- f) Photo 7 of 8

