

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **MAY 14 1986**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic N/A

and/or common West Side Commercial Historic District

2. Location

street & number See Inventory

not for publication

city, town Milwaukee

vicinity of

state Wisconsin

code 55

county Milwaukee

code 079

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name N/A

street & number N/A

city, town N/A

vicinity of N/A

state N/A

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Milwaukee County c/o Edward Kornblum

street & number 901 North 9th Street

city, town Milwaukee

state WI 53233

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Comprehensive Milwaukee Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 901 North 9th Street federal state county local

depository for survey records Department of City Development, 809 North Broadway

city, town Milwaukee

state WI 53202

7. Description

Condition excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The West Side Commercial Historic District is spread across parts of seven blocks of Milwaukee's central business district along West Wisconsin Avenue between the Milwaukee River and North 4th Street. This part of downtown has historically been Milwaukee's major retail and entertainment district.

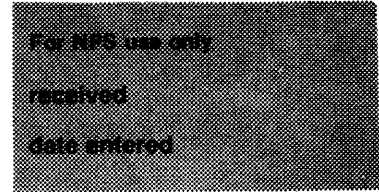
At the heart of the district is the modern Grand Avenue Retail Center. This shopping complex extends through four blocks of historic retail and office buildings on the south side of Wisconsin Avenue as an interior arcade between the city's two largest department stores, Gimbels and Boston Store. The malling effect of the Grand Avenue was achieved by the construction of skywalks between Gimbels (No. 4) and the Plankinton Arcade (No. 5), across North Plankinton Avenue, and between the Plankinton Arcade and 637 North Second Street, across North Second Street. Additional skywalks connecting to buildings in the district are Boston Store (No. 13) to the Reuss Federal Plaza, across West Wisconsin Avenue, and Riverspan, connecting Gimbels to the Marine Bank across the Milwaukee River. All skywalks are of modern design and do not duplicate historical features. There are 21 commercial buildings in the district with six non-contributing buildings. These buildings are of modern design and do not contribute to the district's historical significance. The 15 architecturally and historically significant buildings in the district represent the period of commercial development from 1891 to 1930. Five of these buildings have previously been determined eligible for listing in the National Register.

The district is distinguished from its environs by its visual cohesiveness, its orientation to West Wisconsin Avenue, and by the change in the adjacent land uses. To the east of the district the Milwaukee River has long been a historic natural boundary; to the south is a solid wall of modern parking garages and surface parking lots; to the west are large surface parking lots and modern office buildings; and to the north a jagged line of surface parking lots and lowscale buildings define the northern limits of the district.

The district is a homogenous blend of early twentieth century Commercial Style architecture. Built primarily between 1900 and 1930, the buildings vary in height, mass, scale and architectural treatment, but have in common the repetitive bays and large window areas characteristic of skeleton frame construction. During the 30 years between 1900 and 1930 the entire district was rebuilt with the present office blocks, department stores and retail shops, replacing all but one of the Victorian buildings of the previous generation.

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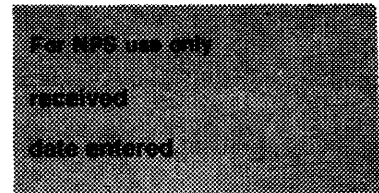
Page 1

The buildings in the district range in height from three-story retail stores such as the former Kresge Building (No. 8)(1930) to 14-story office towers like the Majestic Building (No. 9)(1907) and the Warner Building (No. 18)(1930). The buildings vary greatly in bulk from the large department stores, Gimbels (No. 4) and Boston Store (No. 13), which each grew to cover one-half a city block and the John Plankinton Building (No. 5)(1916/1924-25) which also covers one half of a city block, to much smaller structures such as the three story sliver of the Kresge Building (No. 8)(1930). Most of the structures, however, are quite large, either in ground area or in height.

In general, the district's architecture exemplifies variations on the early twentieth century Commercial Style. Period revival styles were adapted to give the functional forms character. The Matthews Bros. Building (No. 11), a holdover from an earlier era, eclectically combined Neo-Classical motifs in a structure with Romanesque overtones and thus remained strongly rooted in the Victorian period. Much more forward-looking in its design was the Boston Store Building (No. 13)(1895) built by the Plankinton Estate. Its unornamented, straight-forward functional design of strongly articulated repetitive bays presaged the commercial design trends of the early twentieth century that came to dominate the architecture in the district. In terms of surface embellishment, the Neo-Classical pervaded the subsequent development of the district. From its finest expression in the monumental riverfront colonnade of Gimbels (No. 4)(1923-25) to the boldly over-scaled decoration on the facade of the Majestic Building (No. 9)(1907) to the delicate, understated Adamesque decoration of the Empire Building, (No. 3)(1927) classically-inspired detailing was most commonly used. Gothic, Renaissance and Teutonic motifs were also used as sources of inspiration. The John Plankinton Building (No. 5)(1916/1925) exemplifies the exuberant application of Gothic and Renaissance forms rendered in luminous white terra cotta to produce richly sculptured facades that dominate the streetscape. In a daring attempt at architectural uniqueness, the facades of the Wisconsin Hotel were enlivened with patterned brickwork and bold wood eaves and gables in a style reminiscent of the Renaissance mode of Northern Germany. There are some buildings in the district whose architectural expression relied purely on the aesthetic achieved by the structural expression of the skeleton frame. The Caswell Building (No. 20)(1907), Gimbels (No. 4)(1901/1919) and the Merchants and Manufacturer's Bank (No. 1)(1911) and the 1920 addition to the Boston Store (No. 13) are fine examples of the straightforward design characteristic of the Chicago Style that is achieved by the outward expression of the internal framing by the regular repetition of large window bays and the application of smooth, glazed exterior cladding materials. In the last period of its development, the Moderne Style was used to articulate the Warner Building (No. 18)(1930) and the former S. S. Kresge Co. (No. 8)(1930). The verticality of these buildings, particularly the Warner Building, is emphasized by the ribbon-like bands of windows framed by upward-thrusting piers reaching toward the sky uninterrupted by cornices or other roof-defining elements.

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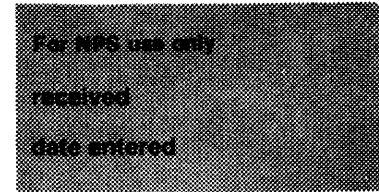
In terms of construction types and materials, the buildings were constructed exclusively of metal frame construction. The exteriors were clad with fireproof materials. Brick, stone and terra-cotta were used to both face exteriors and for trim elements. Metal was used for window frames, spandrel panels and to sheath cornices. Terra-cotta was the most widely used cladding material. In fact, the district includes the city's largest collection of major terra-cotta-clad commercial buildings.

Most of the buildings retain their architectural integrity. Some have lost their cornices, either in part or entirely, such as the Majestic Building and the Waldheim's Building. A few buildings have been so altered that they no longer retain any semblance of their original appearance such as the First Bank Building (No. 7), which was built in 1912 as a magnificent terra-cotta clad Chicago Style commercial building, but was stripped down to its skeleton frame and given a glass curtain wall exterior in 1965 or 220 West Wisconsin Avenue, which was originally a three-story Victorian structure that had its upper two floors removed in 1952. (17)

The following inventory indicates the map number, street address, historic name and use (if known), construction date (if known), and classification code of each building in the district. (C-contributing; NC-non-contributing). Dates of construction were determined by City of Milwaukee building permits. Historic names and uses were determined by newspaper articles, social, business and commercial histories, city directories, fire insurance records and fire insurance maps.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name/Use</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Class</u>
1	740 N. Plankinton Ave.	Merchants & Manufacturers Bank	1911 ¹	C
2	730 N. Plankinton Ave.	Waldheims Furniture	1915 ²	C
3	710 N. Plankinton Ave.	Empire Bldg./Riverside Theater	1927 ³	C
4	101 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Gimbels	1901-01/ 1919 ⁴ 1923-25/ 1984	C
5	161 W. Wisconsin Ave.	John Plankinton Building/ Plankinton Arcade	1916/ 1924-25 ⁵	C
6	637 N. 2nd St.	Retail Building	c.1910 ⁶	C

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7	211 W. Wisconsin Ave.	1st Bank Milwaukee	1912/65 ⁷	NC
8	215 W. Wisconsin Ave.	S. S. Kresge Co.	1930 ⁸	C
9	231 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Majestic Building	1907 ⁹	C
10	275 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Grand Avenue Retail Center	1980-82 ¹⁰	NC
11	301 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Matthews Bros. Building	1891-92 ¹¹	C
12	321 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Woolworth Cafeteria	1980-82 ¹²	NC
13	331 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Boston Store	1895-13 1909 1906/1911/ 1920	C
14	714 N. Old World 3rd St.	Hotel Wisconsin	1913 ¹⁴	C
15	236 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Strauss Building	1924 ¹⁵	C
16	230 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Retail Building	1892/1903/ ¹⁶ 1914/1917/ 1923/1969	NC
17	220 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Retail Building	1952/83 ¹⁷	NC
18	212 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Warner Building/Cinema	1930 ¹⁸	C
19	202 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Retail Building	1936/73 ¹⁹	NC
20	152 W. Wisconsin Ave./ 725 N. Plankinton Ave.	Caswell Building	1907/13 ²⁰	C
21	730 N. Old World 3rd St.	Commercial Building/ Grand Avenue Apts.	1924-25 ²¹	C

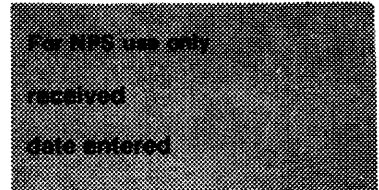
DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

<u>Map. No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
11	301 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Matthews Brothers Building ²²	1891-92

Architects Ferry & Clas designed this finely proportioned commercial building for the Matthews Brothers, a nationally renowned woodworking

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firm.²³ It is an eclectic Renaissance Revival Style former office building that is six stories high with facades articulated with Romanesque and Classical motifs. The company produced mantels, furniture and all varieties of fine interior woodwork, such as the paneling and custom-designed furniture in the Pabst Mansion (NRHP-1972). Molded pressed brick was used in all the arches and terra-cotta was employed for the trim. The Matthews firm is memorialized in the decorative cartouche high on the corner of the building, which displays the letter "M." In 1981-82, the elaborate terra-cotta piers and capitals were restored on the first floor when the storefronts were restored to a period appearance.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
4	101 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Gimbels Department Store ²⁴	1901/02/1919 1923-25

Gimbels is an eight-story classicized Commercial Style building in white glazed brick and terra-cotta. Built in stages, the first part of the complex rose on Wisconsin Avenue from the plans of the well-known Chicago firm of Daniel H. Burnham and Co.²⁵ Alterations to the original structure, plus additions on Michigan Street, were made in 1919. The striking colonnaded riverfront section dates from 1923-25. It was constructed under the supervision of local architect Herman J. Esser and reputedly was modeled after Selfridges Department Store in London.²⁶

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
20	152 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Caswell Building ²⁷	1907/1913

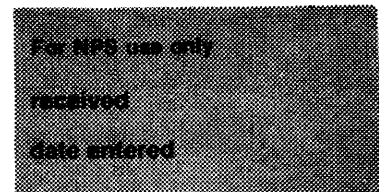
The Caswell Building is a seven-story, Chicago Commercial Style corner block clad with white glazed brick. It was designed by Milwaukee architects, VanRyn and DeGelleke.²⁸ Characteristic of its functional design are the Chicago windows. The main entry is marked by a recessed arched portal decorated with a Gothic-style terra-cotta hood. In 1913, a nine-story addition of compatible design was built on the Plankinton Avenue side.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
9	231 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Majestic Building ²⁹	1907

The Majestic Building, which rises 14 stories, was one of Milwaukee's early skyscraper office towers. Designed by Milwaukee architects, Kirchoff and Rose, the facade was finished with white porcelain brick and white glazed terra-cotta.³⁰ On the main facade, the masonry was banded and rusticated to enrich the Neo-Classical design of the building. Originally, a bold

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modillioned cornice wrapped the top of the building. The lower floors were once occupied by the Majestic Theater, a 2,000 seat vaudeville house. At its completion, it was the city's finest office-entertainment-complex and was connected to the earlier Schlitz Palm Garden, the city's most ornate beer hall, built around the corner on North 3rd Street and the Schlitz Hotel (both razed). In the development of the Grand Avenue Retail Center, the ground floor of the Majestic Building was partially restored to resemble the original rusticated masonry treatment.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
13	331 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Boston Store ³¹	1895/1902/ 1906/1911/ 1920

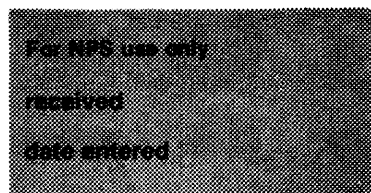
The Boston Store is a large brick Commercial Style building important to the architectural character of West Wisconsin Avenue. The five-story building, constructed in 1895, fronting Wisconsin Avenue, was originally divided into three separate structures. It was designed by local architect, Frank Bugbee.³² Alterations, in 1902 and 1906, removed the partitions making the structure one large department store. In 1911, Henry C. Koch and Co. designed a five-story brick addition to the south³³ and in 1920 William Reichardt designed the large eight-story addition facing Michigan Street that doubled the size of the building. This latter addition is one of the city's best examples of the Chicago Commercial style. The fifth-story windows on the Wisconsin Avenue front of the 1895 building have been covered over and the cornice has been removed.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
14	714 N. 3rd Street	Hotel Wisconsin ³⁴	1913

The twelve-story structure was designed by the Chicago firm of Holabird and Roche.³⁵ It had 500 guest rooms. The architects selected an unusual northern German Renaissance style for the tall building featuring a pitched tile roof and a dramatic soaring gable. The scratch-face dark red brick is trimmed extensively with white brick, buff terra-cotta and has elaborate bracketed eaves trimmed with sheet copper. The facade is decorated with white quoins and an overall pattern of white bricks interspersed among the red bricks.

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<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
5	161 W. Wisconsin Ave.	John Plankinton Building/ Plankinton Arcade ³⁶	1915/1916/ 1924-25

Originally built as a two-story shopping arcade, this half-square block structure was enlarged at a cost of one million dollars in 1925 when five floors of offices were added. The terra-cotta cladding of the original first two floors has Gothic detailing, while the later upper stories are clad in terra-cotta with a Renaissance motif. A richly patterned parapet encircles the building. The interior contains a two-story skylit atrium ringed with two levels of retail shops. The arcade was restored to its original configuration and appearance in 1980-82 as part of the Grand Avenue development. The centerpiece of the arcade is a spectacular central rotunda with a bronze statue of John Plankinton that once stood in the Plankinton House Hotel which previously occupied this site. Around the statue are four circular staircases that lead down to a basement arcade with additional commercial space and a fishpond. Both the original building and the addition were designed by Chicago architects Holabird & Roche.³⁷

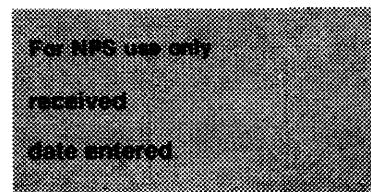
<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
3	710 N. Plankinton Ave.	Empire Building/ Riverside Theater ³⁸	1927

The Empire Building/Riverside Theater is a large classicized commercial block. Designed by Milwaukee architects Kirchoff and Rose, it was constructed to house a large office building, retail shops and a major theater.³⁹ The Empire Building is 12 stories high and clad with light brown tapestry brick. The austere design features a plain mottled, cream-colored terra-cotta two story base with large display windows surmounted by nine stories of regularly-spaced, one-over-one double hung wooden sash and a top story set off by terra-cotta belt courses of boldly enframed, eight-over-eight double hung windows surmounted by foliated terra-cotta transom panels. There is no cornice, only a molded coping.

The principal architectural feature of the building is the Riverside Theater interior. The exterior of the theater is plain except for the requisite marquee, but the interior is huge and ornate. The Riverside Theater interior is French Baroque in style with marble walls and floors, gold leaf moldings, and a color scheme of old ivory, gold and red. The interior of the six-story auditorium is lit by five huge chandeliers. It still contains the original organ, a Wurlitzer 235 Special. After years of neglect, the interior

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of the Riverside was refurbished in November of 1984. The Theater is used for live entertainment, as was intended when it was built.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
8	215 West Wisconsin Avenue	S.S. Kresge Co. ⁴⁰	1930

The three-story Kresge Building is an excellent example of austere Art Deco architecture. The simple limestone clad building features a plain store-front zone surmounted by six-bays of vertical strip windows with patterned black, metal spandrels set deep within massive piers with Art Deco carved capitals. At the top of the building, the name "Kresge", is incised in Art Deco lettering as the central feature of the plain parapet. J.E. Sexton, of the construction and store equipment department of the S.S. Kresge Company, drew the plans.⁴¹ The ground floor was altered to its present appearance as part of the 1980-82 Grand Avenue development.

<u>Map No.</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>
18	212 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Warner Building ⁴²	1930

As one of the city's finest examples of the Moderne Style, this 13-story structure was built by Warner Brothers Theaters, Inc. Chicago architects, C.W. & George L. Rapp, drew the plans for the office structure and the adjacent 2,431-seat theatre.⁴³ Polished pink and black granite clads the first two floors and extends through the 5th floor in a tapering pyramid of ornamental veneer. The steel windows and the cast metal spandrel panels in the four central bays of the facade are set deep within plain piers that extend in an unbroken line up through the parapet giving the building its vertical emphasis.

The office building entrance and lobby are embellished with nickel-plated radiator shields, balustrades, mailbox, and grilles, all in the Art Deco style.

The theater itself featured a combination of two different styles of decor that create a unique contrast between the auditorium and the lobby. The breathtaking three-story lobby is a dazzling essay in the gilded and silvered high Art Deco interior design that was all the rage in America in the late 1920's. It is one of the finest Art Deco interiors in Wisconsin. By contrast, the theater auditorium is decorated lavishly in the French Renaissance style of Louis XIV. It is not known why the theater was designed so differently from the lobby and office building. Even the exterior of the

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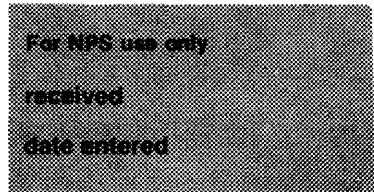
theater auditorium facing N. Second Street is done in brick in French eighteenth century style.

In 1966, the Warner was purchased by the Marcus Corporation and renamed the Centre. In 1973, the theater was twinned, separating the balcony and main floor to create two theaters. Although the majesty of the original four story high auditorium was lost in the process by the insertion of a false floor at the second floor level, the original ornamentation remains intact in both the upper and lower theaters. In 1981, famed New York artist, Richard Haas, a native of Milwaukee, was commissioned to transform the blank brick east elevation into a tromp l'oeil mural that parodied the design of the main facade. The theaters were renamed the Grand Cinemas in 1982 and the lobby was refurbished to restore luster to its fading glitter. The present marquee was installed at that time.

Archaeological Resources: Because the West Side Commercial Historic District has been developed since 1856, it is unlikely that significant archaeological resources survive undisturbed.

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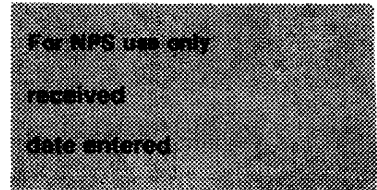
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FOOTNOTES #7

- ¹City of Milwaukee Building Permit.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹Ibid.

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- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Period of Significance _____
Specific dates 1891-1930 **Builder/Architect** See Below

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The West Side Commercial Historic District is architecturally significant for its fine collection of early twentieth century commercial buildings. It contains the city's largest retail structures as well as the finest remaining theaters and some of the study area's best early twentieth century office buildings. The district is historically significant as Milwaukee's traditional major retailing and entertainment center.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Milwaukee's commercial history began with the first town settlement in 1835. Prior to this, extensive commercial trade had been carried on between French Canadian traders and the Indians at this location, but little permanent construction had resulted. In Wisconsin, sites on Lake Michigan were favored locations for trade with the Indians. Throughout the 18th century various fur trading posts had been established in the Milwaukee area along the river estuaries, but none of these had resulted in permanent settlement. Jacques Vieau was one of an early group of fur traders who had established a major trading center at Green Bay. In 1795 he came to Milwaukee and established a seasonal post on a knoll overlooking the Menomonee River in present day Mitchell Park. Vieau divided his time between his two posts and was not a permanent resident of the Milwaukee area.¹ In 1818 a young French Canadian, Solomon Juneau, came to Milwaukee to work as a clerk for Vieau. Juneau married Vieau's daughter, Josette, in 1820 and assumed control of the business within a couple of years. Juneau is considered by most accounts to have been the first permanent settler of Milwaukee. He built his cabin in 1822 at what is now the northwest corner of North Water Street and East Wisconsin Avenue.² Juneau remained at this site the year round where he operated a trading post in a separate building. Permanent settlement of any kind in the region was inhibited by Indian control of southeastern Wisconsin. Treaties with the Indians in 1831 and 1833 ceded this part of the state to the federal government. Almost immediately after the land was surveyed and put up for sale, European and Yankee settlement began in earnest.³

Milwaukee's topography influenced the physical and political character of the early settlement. The Milwaukee and Menomonee Rivers divided the area into three sections: east, west, and south. By 1835 when the Indian lands had been surveyed and were ready for public sale, a handful of promoters had already claimed the lands which comprised the original nucleus of Milwaukee. Morgan L. Martin, in partnership with Solomon Juneau, staked out the eastern

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Item 9, Continuation p. 1.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 11.8

Quadrangle name SW/4 MILWAUKEE, WI

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	4	2	5	5	0	0	4	7	6	5	3	9	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

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Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

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D

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Zone	Easting				Northing									

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Zone	Easting				Northing									

G

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Zone	Easting				Northing									

H

Zone	Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Item 8, pp. 15,16

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Les Voilmert, Sr. Planner; Robin Wenger, Assoc. Planner; Carlen Hatala, Consultant

organization Department of City Development date

street & number 809 North Broadway telephone 414/223-5706

city or town Milwaukee state WI 53202

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

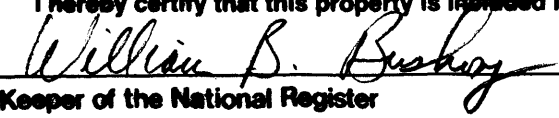
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title date APRIL 30, 1986

For NPS use only **Determined Eligible**
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

DOE/OWNER OBJECTION


Keeper of the National Register

date 6/25/86

Attest: Chief of Registration date

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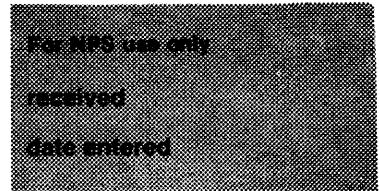
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wedge between the lake and the Milwaukee river as a townsite. This is where the historic district is located. Byron Kilbourn, an Ohio engineer and surveyor, chose land on the west side of the Milwaukee River. The third developer, George H. Walker, established his claim south of the Milwaukee river on a peninsula which became known as Walker's Point (listed in the NRHP 121978). Thus, Milwaukee's development began as three separate speculative real estate ventures. Rivalry among the original town-makers, "induced by the speculative origins of the towns and fostered by the existence of the river barrier," characterized Milwaukee from the beginning.⁴

The 1830s were the heyday of land speculation and townsite promotion in the territory between the Allegheny Mountains and the Mississippi River. In Milwaukee, this not only produced competing settlements but also influenced the original layout of the village. In 1835 Kilbourn and Juneau filed their respective plats for the west and east sides. Both plats followed the gridiron plan of repetitive rectangular blocks which was the most common layout of western towns during the nineteenth century. This plan facilitated land survey, lot subdivision, and sales. Its uniformity appealed to promoters and prospective buyers alike. Both the Kilbourn and Juneau plats, however, shared the typical failing of the gridiron plan: they disregarded topography. The plats preserved the straight line and the right angle at the expense of the natural lay of the land and the individual features of the site. The only deviation in Milwaukee's checkerboard street pattern was East Water Street (today's North Water Street) and North Water Street (now a part of Plankinton Avenue), which paralleled the crooked course of the Milwaukee River. Several randomly-placed public squares were also included in both plats. Because of competition between Juneau and Kilbourn, however, the east-west streets of the two plats did not align and were given different names.⁶

Despite its formal gridiron plan, Milwaukee at this time was a small frontier village of scattered buildings. Writing in the early 1840's Increase Lapham described some of the site's features:

The city commences about a mile above the mouth of the river, at a place called Walker's Point, and extends about a mile and a half along the river. Below Walker's Point, the river is bordered by impassable marshes. The ground occupied by the town is uneven, rising from the river from fifty to one hundred feet, thus affording very beautiful stations for residences, commanding a full view of the town and bay, with its shipping. But few of these sites have yet been occupied and improved, as their peculiar importance and interesting views would lead us to suspect.⁶

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Throughout the small riverfront community, radical alterations of the terrain had begun by the 1840s. Hills and bluffs were removed or graded (eliminating, no doubt, some of the commanding views) and the remaining soil was used to fill in the extensive marshes and lowlands along the river banks. These and other costly "improvements" were financed by the local promoters (chiefly Byron Kilbourn and Solomon Juneau) to entice settlers to their respective townsites. By 1837, Kilbourn had spent about thirteen thousand dollars for the construction of roads and streets.⁷ Today the topography is so altered from its original state that it is difficult to conceive of the original irregular terrain with its bluffs, ravines and swamps.

In Juneautown, on the east side of the river, most of the buildings clustered along Water Street near the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue. Kilbourntown, on the west side, was centered at the corner of Third Street and Juneau Avenue. Among the earliest structures built were log cabins and "claim shanties," built by driving stakes in the ground and surrounding them with basswood lumber. These were modest structures, one to three stories high. The early town consisted of a random jumble of dwellings, stores, taverns, sawmills, and shops belonging to blacksmiths, coopers, and other tradesmen.

Most of the dwellings were "mere shells inclosed (sic) with siding, their flimsiness not infrequently disguised by a false front." As early as 1836, however, the first two brick houses were built of locally-made cream brick, a building material for which Milwaukee would later become famous. The first brick store block was erected in 1840 at the northwest corner of Third and Juneau Streets. It was three stories high, and housed the first theater in Milwaukee.⁸ None of these buildings remain today.

Between 1835 and 1840 the population of Milwaukee expanded from 125 to 1,692. Although the majority were Yankees from New York State and New England, Milwaukee's population was ethnically diverse from the beginning. The first groups of British, German, Irish, and Norwegian immigrants started arriving before 1840. The first black settler, Joe Oliver, who worked for Solomon Juneau as a cook, arrived in 1835.⁹

As the pioneer trading posts gave way to a permanent village settlement with improved streets and waterways and the erection of saw and flour mills, the growing population demanded businesses that could provide goods and services. On both sides of the river, offices and shops were opened - land offices and lawyers' offices, liveries and blacksmiths, hotels and taverns, and stores which sold everything from salt to books. Originally, commercial activity on the west side was concentrated at what is now West Juneau Avenue and Old World 3rd Street. There, on the high ground, five blocks north of present day West Wisconsin Avenue, Byron Kilbourn commenced to build his village. By the early 1840's shops and dwellings lined 3rd Street as far

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north as West Walnut Street, and were scattered along the cross streets to the Milwaukee River on the east and to North 5th Street on the west.

Development was not immediately possible on West Wisconsin Avenue because the vicinity of Wisconsin and Plankinton Avenues was a swamp covered with two to six feet of water where wild rice and tamarack trees grew. This prompted pioneer-historian James Buck to comment that for a long period of time, "Chestnut (Juneau) and 3rd was the heart of the flourishing business section . . . while Spring Street (West Wisconsin Avenue) was quiescent."¹⁰ The earliest recorded businesses built in the vicinity of Wisconsin Avenue were the wooden store of Dr. William Gorham and W.R. Longstreet on the west side of North 2nd Street and a large frame structure set upon posts to keep it out of the water on the east side of (today's) Plankinton Avenue that served as part of Solomon Juneau's trading post.¹¹ Beginning in 1837, the swamps were drained and then filled with earth taken from the bluffs that rose at present day North 4th and North 5th Streets. By 1840, however, Spring Street was still a minor roadway that was open only as far west as 5th Street where a precipitous hill made westward travel impossible without an arduous detour.¹²

At this time, several pioneer entrepreneurs recognized the development potential of the west side and began to make substantial physical improvements. In 1842, James H. Rogers erected a bridge over the Milwaukee River to connect Spring Street with East Wisconsin Avenue on the east side. Although a bridge had existed since 1840 at Juneau Avenue, this was the first direct link between the west side and the town's primary business district on the east side centered about North Water Street and East Wisconsin Avenue. Charles M. Williams was instrumental in widening and grading Spring Street into a major thoroughfare from the Milwaukee River west to North 6th Street. He was credited with leveling the impassable hill at North 5th Street which allowed a free flow of traffic to the west. With the barriers removed, the street widened and a direct link established with the east side, Edward D. Holton, Harvey Birchard and John Plankinton built commercial buildings on Spring Street between the river and North 2nd Street around 1844, inaugurating Spring Street's emergence as a commercially important extension of the city's main business district across the river on North Water Street.¹³ It was still overshadowed in importance, however, by the old commercial node at North 3rd Street and Juneau Avenue.

As the city boomed in the 1850's, North Plankinton Avenue adjacent to the river became lined with wholesale and commission trading houses from where it merged with 3rd Street at State Street on the north to its beginning at the mouth of the Menomonee River on the south, forging a link between the 3rd and Juneau and Spring Street business areas. Clybourn Street, two blocks south of Spring Street, also emerged as an important artery lined with warehouses as an extension of the similar development on East Clybourn Street across the river

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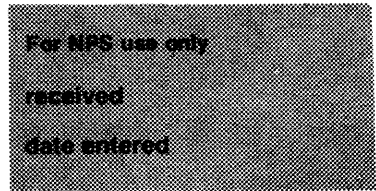
where the first piers to accommodate Lake Michigan shipping had been built in 1842 and 1843.¹⁴ When Spring Street became an improved roadway in the early 1840s, it was quickly built up with small one- and two-story frame commercial buildings used for retail and service trade. Often the shopkeeper lived above his store or in a cottage next door. These small frame structures were mixed with the larger brick blocks erected by Holton, Birchard and Plankinton.

In the decades after the Civil War (1865-1885), Spring Street emerged as a more important commercial area than 3rd and Juneau and was gradually rebuilt with large commercial blocks. Moving west from the river, the smaller buildings of the previous generation were replaced with substantial brick store buildings, although most paled in comparison with the grandeur of the new buildings being erected on the east side. Although in the late 1860's, the west side business district on West Wisconsin Avenue only extended as far west as North 4th Street, beyond which were houses, by 1880 it had spread to North 6th Street. Retail trade dominated the street as it emerged in the 1880's as Milwaukee's premier shopping district. Inventories produced by the Milwaukee Board of Fire Underwriters for 1867 and 1872 list almost all of the businesses between the river and 4th street and later 6th Street as being engaged in some form of retail trade. Although generally fairly modest in terms of architectural pretension, the street was adorned with a few truly impressive buildings, most notably the mammoth Plankinton House Hotel, which grew to occupy the entire frontage between Plankinton Avenue and North 2nd Street; the Loan and Trust Building at the northwest corner of Wisconsin and North 2nd; Merrill's Building on the present site of the S.S. Kresge Building at 215 West Wisconsin Avenue, and the magnificent Library Block at the northwest corner of Wisconsin Avenue and North 4th Street. The architecture of these buildings rivaled the impressive banks, corporate headquarters, and wholesale houses being built on the east side, and prompted west side businessmen, lead by Sherburn S. Merrill, manager of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, to have the street renamed Grand Avenue in 1875. By the 1880s, Grand Avenue was the principal major retail section of the city.

As Milwaukee's economy boomed in the 1890's and more consumer goods became available, the Grand Avenue retail strip flourished. The small stores gradually grew into major mercantile palaces and expanded into adjacent buildings. There was a concurrent increase in demand for more office space. This was most evident in the ornate new office blocks erected on the east side in the 1870's and 1880's where the demand was greatest, but it began to affect the west side about 1890. About this time the Library Block (razed), the oldest of the major west side office buildings, was enlarged and the Loan and Trust Building and Merrill's Building (both razed) were built. The 1891 Matthews Brothers Building (No. 8) is the sole survivor of these early office buildings in the district. In its construction it illustrated an important feature of west side office buildings in that its ground floor was entirely designed for commercial use and its office building functions were played down.

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East side office buildings of this date tended to either not have commercial space at all or else to make it subordinate in design importance to its office functions. For the rest of its history, the district would always emphasize retail space in its building design with offices added almost as an afterthought. Eventually many office buildings, such as Merrill's Building and the Library Block, would be razed to make way for retail buildings with no office space at all.

The early twentieth century witnessed the complete rebuilding of the district. The trend to bigness in retailing necessitated the construction of massive new commercial structures to house the emerging department stores and the increasing space requirements of the major specialty retailers who were flocking to Wisconsin Avenue. Gone were the numerous small, proprietor-run shops of the Victorian era. In their place were major apparel stores offering full lines of clothing and the drug stores and dime stores of major national chains. These businesses, with their modern merchandising techniques, required more expansive and adaptable quarters than the typical fifteen or twenty-foot-wide shop of the Victorian era.

At the same time, the district's emergence as the city's theater district resulted in the construction of ever larger theaters, as small parcels were consolidated into large tracts and cleared of their jumble of old buildings to make way for gargantuan new burlesque and movie theaters. The result was the wholesale replacement of all of the Victorian building stock except for a few substantial structures such as the Matthews Brothers Building and the Boston Store Block.

In addition to major retailing, the district emerged as the city's entertainment district after 1900. Although there had been theaters in the area since at least the 1860's, it was not until the early 1900's when regular circuits of live entertainment began to call at Milwaukee with great frequency that modern, fire-proof theaters of the type we know today began to be built on a grand scale. The advent and popularization of motion pictures after 1900 resulted in the establishment of numerous nickelodens, and later, about 1910, actual movie theaters. These joined the pre-existing beer halls and fashionable restaurants to form an entertainment district centered around North 3rd Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Some of the large theater buildings included hotels, restaurants and barrooms on their premises. Of the numerous theaters that could once be found in the district, only two, the last built in the downtown, are still extant today, the Warner (No. 18)(1930) and the Riverside (No. 3)(1927).

With the onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930's, new construction in the district virtually halted, except for storefront remodelings. This freeze on significant construction in the district was

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prolonged by construction material shortages during World War II. Since World War II, a lessening of importance of the role of the Central Business District in the life of the city has resulted in significant changes in the west side central business district. Almost immediately after the war, the theaters, both cinemas and legitimate stages, either significantly reduced the number of shows or downgraded the quality of the performances in reaction to drastically reduced attendance. The main population center had begun its movement to the suburbs and the patrons who had previously attended the lavish downtown theaters en masse now went to the movies in their suburban neighborhoods. Burlesque and live variety shows had passed from fashion. By the early 1960's, all of the live stages had closed and the remaining downtown movie theaters had reacted to a decline in family attendance by showing cheap, B-grade horror and pornographic movies. Gradually, one after another, the grand old theaters were razed in the 1960's and 1970's.

Following the same pattern, many long standing restaurants and night spots closed. The numerous hotels that once housed business travelers, tourists, and even celebrities, were gradually reduced to the status of single room occupancy hotels that provided low cost, long term housing to the city's poorer classes or worse, became transient flophouses before they, too, succumbed to the wrecking ball. Paralleling the death of the entertainment district, was the decline of West Wisconsin Avenue as the city's major retail shopping district. First the neighborhood shopping strip, then the enclosed suburban mall, drew thousands of customers away from downtown stores. With the departure of many small retailers and the growing popularity of the suburban malls, the downtown by the early 1970's had lost its status as the city's number one shopping district in terms of annual sales. The role of downtown as the city's major retail district was severely weakened during this period, as many of Milwaukee's long-standing, high-quality retailers either went out of business or moved to the suburbs. One important factor that kept downtown retailing from completely dying was that Gimbels and the Boston Store maintained their downtown flagship stores, in spite of the higher profit margins earned by their suburban branches.

In the past few years, the west side business district has experienced an intensive renewal that has reclaimed a considerable amount of its former retailing prestige. This renaissance began in 1982 with the completion of the Grand Avenue Mall Retail Center. This development linked four blocks of existing retail and office buildings on West Wisconsin Avenue between Gimbels and the Boston Store by means of an ingenious interior arcade. Skywalks were erected to connect Gimbels with the Plankinton Arcade across Plankinton Avenue and the Arcade with a new three level shopping galleria called the Grand Court. The Grand Court was built between the Majestic Building and the Matthew Brothers Building over North 3rd Street. The exteriors of the architecturally

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significant buildings (Plankinton Arcade, S.S. Kresge Co., Majestic and Matthews Brothers Buildings) were restored. The interior of the Plankinton Arcade, which had been drastically altered in the 1950's and 1960's, was restored to its original appearance. When it opened in August of 1982, the Grand Avenue was an immediate success that has prompted the refurbishing and upgrading of numerous adjacent buildings in the district and has helped restore the downtown to its traditional position as a major retailing center.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

ARCHITECTURE

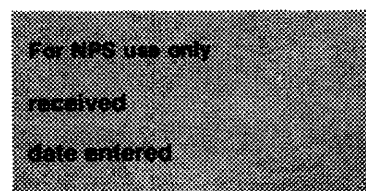
The West Side Commercial Historic District is architecturally significant for its fine collection of early twentieth century commercial structures. These include the city's finest major retailing structures and theaters as well as a good collection of office buildings. The district is characterized by the extensive use of terra-cotta and white-glazed-brick cladding.

The retailing structures in the district range from the huge, white-terra-cotta-clad Gimbels Department Store (No. 4), a superb example of Chicago Style design by the famous Chicago architecture firm of Daniel H. Burnham & Company, to the austere functional Boston Store (No. 13) with its simple rhythmic bays of large double-hung windows set off by massive brick piers. Perhaps the finest and most unusual commercial building in the district is the Plankinton Arcade (No. 5), a richly detailed, Renaissance style, white-terra-cotta clad structure containing a two-level glass-roofed shopping arcade on the interior. There are a wide variety of other retailing buildings in the district ranging from the straightforward classicism of the dazzling white Waldheim's Building (No. 2) to the bold modernism of the Art Deco Style Kresge Building (No. 8).

Office buildings, all of which were designed to contain one or two levels of retailing space at the street level, are also numerous. These vary greatly in style from the somber, brown, richly ornamented eclectic Victorian style Matthews Brothers Building (No. 11) to the buff limestone, sparingly-detailed Moderne, Warner Building (No. 18). Between these extremes are a wide range of stylistic types including the austere functional, white-glazed-brick, Chicago Commercial Style Caswell Building (No. 20), the white-terra-cotta, Beaux Arts classical Majestic Building (No. 9), the cream terra-cotta 1920's historical revival style Strauss Building (No. 15) and the brown brick, sparingly detailed, traditional style Empire Building (No. 3). Not an office building, but certainly one of the most architecturally unusual buildings ever built in the city, is the exotically polychromed, wine red and white brick German Renaissance Style Hotel Wisconsin (No. 14) with its pitched-tile-roof and wide overhanging, copper-trimmed wooden eaves.

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Because of their functional commercial nature, few of the buildings in the district contain architecturally significant interior spaces. The exceptions are the Plankinton Arcade and the magnificent theaters in the Empire Building (No. 3) (Riverside Theater) and the Warner Building (No. 18)(Grand Theater). The skylit, two-story, Plankinton Arcade (No. 5) is focused on a grand, three-story, glass-roofed rotunda containing a statue of the building's namesake, John Plankinton. The Gothic style interior with its glass roof and grand staircase is one of the finest arcade interiors in the region. The Riverside Theater is a study in French Baroque elegance while the less elaborate Grand Theater auditorium, although now altered into a twin theater, reflects more restrained eighteenth century French styling. The Grand Theater's lobby, however, is decorated in complete contrast to its auditorium in high Art Deco style. It is a dazzling essay in silver and gold 1920's stylized ornament.

The architects of the buildings in the district included some of the most distinguished local and regional firms of the early twentieth century. The Chicago firms included Daniel H. Burnham and Company [Gimbels (No. 4) 1901-02, 1919]; and Holabird and Roche [John Plankinton Building (No. 5) 1916, 1925 and the Hotel Wisconsin (No. 14) 1913]. Both were major Chicago architecture firms with national reputations for their commercial work. Rapp and Rapp, the nationally acclaimed theater architects from Chicago, designed the Deco-Moderne style Warner Theater Building (No. 18) with its eighteenth century French auditorium. Another out-of-town architect was J.E. Sexton, corporate architect for the Detroit-based S.S. Kresge Company, who designed the Kresge Building (No. 8).

Local architects included many of Milwaukee's biggest and most prominent firms. Henry C. Koch & Co. whose firm is perhaps best known for designing the Milwaukee City Hall (NRHP-1973) designed the 1911 addition to the Boston Store facing Michigan Street, while Ferry & Clas (Milwaukee Public Library - NRHP 1974) designed the Matthews Brothers Building (No. 11; 1891). Kirchoff and Rose, another important local firm, designed two major structures for the Uihlein family, the Majestic Building (No. 9; 1907) and the Empire Building (No. 3; 1927). Both were originally combination theater and office buildings, but the theater auditorium in the Majestic Building was destroyed many years ago and the space converted to offices. VanRyn and DeGelleke, another Milwaukee firm best known for its extensive institutional work around the state, designed the forward-looking gleaming white, Chicago Commercial style Caswell Building (No. 20; 1907).

COMMERCE

The West Side Commercial Historic District is significant as the center of major retailing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city. The area included

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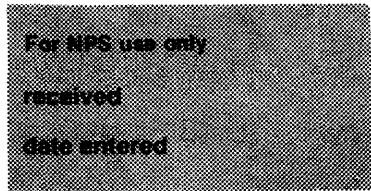
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most of the city's major department stores, although only two remain today, as well as being the site of the city's first national chain stores and home to such innovative retailing structures as the Plankinton Arcade.

DEPARTMENT STORES

The historic district is importantly associated with the rise of the department store as a retailing institution in Milwaukee. It contains the two oldest and largest remaining department stores in Milwaukee, the Boston Store and Gimbel's.

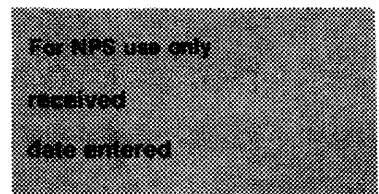
Gimbel's Midwest

Gimbel's Milwaukee history began in September, 1887, when members of the Gimbel family opened their first 30' x 100' store at what was then Number 5 Grand Avenue, on the site of the present building. Bavarian immigrant Adam Gimbel had come to the United States in 1835 and worked as a peddler for several years before settling in Vincennes, Indiana, to open his Palace of Trade in 1842. By the 1880's the business was so successful that it occupied all four corners of the city square and had branches in several cities. As Vincennes' river trade declined due to the construction of the railroad, and Adam Gimbel prepared to retire, his seven sons searched for a new market. Milwaukee was chosen for its promising combination of rail and water facilities and its sizable population. In 1887, when Adam Gimbel retired to Philadelphia to head the company's buying office, the brothers moved the store to Milwaukee. Jacob Gimbel selected the Grand Avenue site which provided four floors, a basement and two show windows flanking the entrance. Gimbel's nationwide reputation as one of the midwest's leading retail families preceded them to Milwaukee and their opening day was noted in papers as far away as the New York Sun as well as by the local press. The store was reputedly more tasteful and pleasing than under the building's former occupant, The Fair Store. The four floors of merchandise included dry goods, men's furnishings, cloaks, carpeting, rugs and curtains. Some seventy-five employees were hired to staff the store, most of whom were women. Management rested chiefly with Jacob and Ellis Gimbel.

Gimbel's soon embarked on an expansion program that continued until it had acquired the entire block bounded by the Milwaukee River, West Wisconsin, North Plankinton and West Michigan streets, a process that lasted until the turn of the century. The store's success was the result of continuing merchandising practices begun by Adam Gimbel in 1842, namely, the organization of goods into "departments", the setting of fixed prices and the procurement of a wide variety of goods. The brothers also advertised heavily in the German and English language newspapers and had such promotions as bargain Fridays. Credit was readily extended and packages were delivered free.

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Although Gimbel's was from its beginning organized along department lines, it did not start calling itself a department store until early in this century. It first listed itself as a department store in the 1909 city directory, but was still cross indexed under retail dry goods as well. As did other retailers in this century, Gimbel's gradually replaced its fabric and piece good lines with ready-to-wear clothing.

In later years, the Gimbel Brothers established stores in Philadelphia and New York. The company has since grown into a major national retailer and is now owned by the British conglomerate BATUS. The downtown store is the flagship store for the Midwest division.

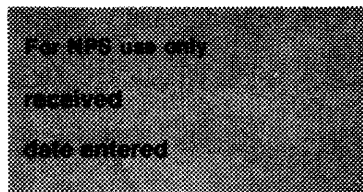
Boston Store

The Boston Store was the first of the city's big retailers to advertise itself as a department store and actually operate under the organization of a modern department store. Founder Julius Simon came to Milwaukee from Portage, Wisconsin in 1897 and opened his department store. Two earlier businesses with the name Boston Store had existed in Milwaukee prior to Simon's business, but they were unrelated to Simon's store. One in the 1870's had been located east of the Milwaukee River and was part of a now defunct national chain of 99 cent stores. The other had been a short lived enterprise, The Boston Store, which operated out of the Lipps Building at 1103 Old World Third Street. It fell into bankruptcy and the merchandise was sold at auction. Oddly enough, Simon chose the same name and location for his new business, dropping the "The" in the name and advertising himself as a new and different concern. He later indicated that he was inspired by the Boston Store then operating out of Chicago. The expanding business outgrew the Lipps Building and moved in 1900 to its present location at the southeast corner of Wisconsin Avenue and 4th Street, in a portion of a building that had been constructed in 1895 by the Plankinton Estate. Numerous ads placed daily in the papers through April, 1900, played up the four acres of merchandise and its location at the retailing center of Milwaukee. Low markup and volume sales made the store popular. Between 1902-1906 interior partitions were removed and the store expanded into the entire building. In 1911, H.C. Koch and Company designed a five-story addition to the south and in 1920 a \$800,000 eight-story addition was constructed along Michigan Street. The present store maintains these boundaries which consist of an entire half block bounded by Wisconsin Avenue, North 3rd and 4th Streets, and Michigan Avenue.

Boston Store's actual departmentalization, as the term is now understood, began in 1903. In that year Carl Herzfeld and Nathan Stone took over management of some of Simon's departments in addition to reorganizing the business and planning for future operations. Initially Herzfeld was the active partner and it was not until 1906 that Stone relocated from Chicago to

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participate in the business. It was about this time that Julius Simon sold his lease to the Herzfeld-Phillipson Company and retired from business. The company remained under the direct management of the Herzfeld's until it was acquired by Federated Department Stores in 1947. In 1985, the Boston Store was bought by Bergner's of Peoria, Illinois. The downtown store is now the flagship store of a regional chain of department stores.

VARIETY AND CHAIN STORES

As can be seen, the early 20th century witnessed the emergence of large scale retailing in Milwaukee. The period was one of significant change in retailing concepts as highly competitive chains of variety stores and ready-to-wear shops competed with the small independent merchants for the consumer dollar. The tremendous increase in the number of consumer products and the increased spending power of the consumer led to the development of such nationwide retailing chains as J.C. Penney, S.S. Kresge and F.W. Woolworth and to the establishment of numerous specialty shops that catered to specific consumer needs and economic groups. The one classification of shopkeeper to disappear in the midst of this revolution in retailing was the manufacturing merchant who actually made the products that were sold in his shop. A new type of store to emerge at this time was the five and dime variety store that promised and delivered all sorts of novelties for literally pennies. Two prominent nationwide chains, S.S. Kresge's and F.W. Woolworth's, were both represented in the historic district at an early date and established themselves within a few years of one another.

S.S. Kresge

Kresge's was the first of the big variety store chains to become established in Milwaukee. Sebastian S. Kresge entered the dime store business in 1897 when he went into partnership in a store in Memphis, Tennessee. A year later he opened a second in Detroit and in 1899 made Detroit his headquarters. The Milwaukee store was opened in 1909 and was located at 313-315 West Wisconsin Avenue next door to the Matthews Brothers Building. Following the example of Frank Woolworth before him, Kresge kept prices to a dime until World War I inflation necessitated an increase to a quarter in 1917. Within four years, some items were selling for as much as a dollar. Milwaukee's Kresge's store ultimately moved to its own building at 219 West Wisconsin Avenue (No. 8) in 1930, a Art Deco structure that replaced the old Merrill Building on the site. It closed its downtown store in 1955.

F.W. Woolworth

Frank Winfield Woolworth began his merchandising empire in 1879 as an extension of the 5¢ counter used as a sales tactic by his employer and others

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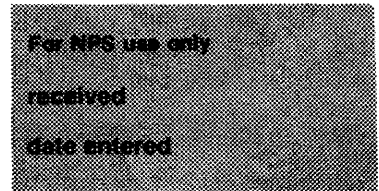
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in the midwest and mid Atlantic states. His successful Lancaster, Pennsylvania, store soon added 10¢ items and by 1886, Woolworth had 10 red-front stores in the east. By 1890 expansion was set at some 10 to 12 stores per year and Woolworth had become a recognized force in retailing popularizing such European goods and traditions as the Christmas tree ornament. By 1911, Woolworth had some 319 stores throughout the world, making "five and dime" a popular expression internationally. After consolidation with four other firms, the business became known as the F.W. Woolworth Company with 596 stores doing a million dollars a week in business. Woolworth's Milwaukee branch came about when Woolworth bought the four Buffalo-based S.H. Knox 5-and-10-cent stores in 1912. Knox's chief Milwaukee location was the Matthews Brothers Building (No. 11) at 3rd Street and Wisconsin Avenue. After \$35,000 worth of remodeling, Woolworth's opened this as their main store on September 14, 1912, advertising it to be the biggest of its kind in the world. In 1925, Woolworth's paid \$1,400,000 to purchase the Matthews Brothers Building. Other Woolworth stores were located on East Wisconsin Avenue, North 3rd Street and West National Avenue. Woolworth's did a major remodeling of the Matthews Brothers Block in 1956, obliterating the 19th century character of the lower two floors, and adding an escalator, two new lunch departments and new counters to the store. Woolworth's continues to occupy the Matthews Brothers Building today in addition to operating thirteen other stores in the Milwaukee area. As a result of its incorporation in the Grand Avenue Shopping Center, Woolworth's recreated the nineteenth century ground floor facade of the Matthews Brothers Building to replace the 1950's remodeling.

The Plankinton Arcade

In addition to the introduction of national chain stores, probably the most innovative merchandising concept to appear in Milwaukee in the early twentieth century was the Plankinton Arcade (No. 5) built in 1915. Lauded by merchandisers as one of the most desirable features of the business district, the arcade was the forerunner of today's enclosed shopping mall with one structure housing numerous independent shops focused on an interior circulation area. The origins of the American shopping arcade can be traced to eastern cities such as Providence, Rhode Island, where similar arcades erected as early as the 1820's are still extant. In the midwest, the arcade concept was popularized by the success of the spectacular Cleveland Arcade built in 1890. Soon, arcades were built in Detroit and other cities. The Cleveland Arcade and its imitators were more directly influenced by the famous nineteenth century European arcades that had been built in Berlin, London, Brussels and Moscow. The most famous of the extant European arcades is the "Galleria Vittorio Emanuele" in Milan, Italy. The design concept of these arcades and the one in Cleveland was to connect two major commercial thoroughfares not directly accessible to each other by a covered pedestrian walkway. The arcades were built in response to the increased congestion of downtowns when both pedestrians and vehicular traffic competed for the use of

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streets and sidewalks designed to handle lesser volumes. The arcade not only directed pedestrians off the street, but eased their movement from one major arterial to another. In Europe, the arcades were majestic spaces with four and five levels of shops that ringed the passageways lighted by skylights and organized around a central rotunda. The interiors were richly ornamented with Renaissance and Medieval motifs, statuary and fountains. Incorporated into the arcades were restaurants, ballrooms, beer gardens and offices. The construction of the arcade was also a reflection of the advancing technology of steel and glass skeleton frame constructions. The Cleveland Arcade directly emulated the European ones with five levels of shops that connected Euclid and Superior Avenues. Anchoring each end was a massive nine-story office building designed in the Romanesque Revival style.

In contrast to the European and Cleveland examples, the Plankinton Arcade was constructed specifically to merchandise retail goods and does not function as a through-the-block line between major streets. It was built on the front half of the block on West Wisconsin Avenue between North 2nd Street and Plankinton Avenue in a cruciform plan that did not originally connect important commercial streets on either axis. It was much closer in concept to a modern shopping center in that its interior atrium was a destination in itself rather than a passage to other destinations. The Plankinton Arcade contains two levels of retail space for up to 130 small shops that encircle an atrium and central rotunda covered by skylights. It originally included a basement level with a first class dining salon, a 60 table billiard hall, a 41 lane bowling alley and a Turkish bath. A hotel and theater were intended to be connected to the arcade to make it a retail and entertainment complex covering the entire block to Michigan Street. The 500 room Plankinton Hotel (non-exant) was built in 1917 on the northwest corner of Michigan Street and Plankinton Avenue, but the theater was never constructed because the necessary parcels of land could not be obtained. Five floors of offices were added over the retail portion of the existing arcade in 1925. The Plankinton Arcade is one of the finest surviving early twentieth century commercial arcades in the United States.

THEATER

The West Side Commercial Historic District is significant for its role as the city's entertainment district in the early twentieth century. It contains two of the finest surviving theater interiors in the city. Originally the area included many other theaters, beer halls, nightclubs, restaurants and fashionable hotels that together constituted the largest entertainment complex in Wisconsin, although most of the structures that housed them have been razed since World War II.

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Variety shows, vaudeville and burlesque emerged as the dominant form of popular entertainment during the period from the 1880's until World War I and a theater district developed along North Second and Third Streets and West Wisconsin Avenue in the early 1900s. This locale, in the hub of retail activity, on the major streetcar lines, close to the larger hotels and just two blocks from the Milwaukee Road Railroad Depot, was an ideal location because of its accessibility to audiences. The vaudeville theaters, most of which were large and costly structures with hotels, restaurants and saloons incorporated into them were soon joined by nickelodeons and early movie houses. From 1910 to 1917, numerous new motion picture theaters were built and older buildings were remodeled for movie viewing as interest in the new media grew. Despite a critic's prediction that the patrons' overexposure to film and the overabundance of theaters would lead to the industry's collapse, the motion picture business thrived. During its 1920's heyday, two huge theaters were constructed in the district, the Riverside Theater (1927), a combination vaudeville/movie house, and the Warner (1931), a movie palace. In its heyday, Milwaukee's theater district contained over twenty showhouses within a six block area. The most significant included the Crystal and the Bijou theaters on Second Street, the American, the Princess, the White House, the Vaudette, the Orpheum, the Davidson and the Miller on Third Street, and the Riverside, the Warner, the Majestic, the Merrill, the Alhambra, the Strand, the Palace, the Telenews, the Butterfly, the Rialto and the Wisconsin on West Wisconsin Avenue. Only the Wisconsin, the Warner (Grand Theater, No. 18) and the (Riverside, No. 3) survive today. The Wisconsin is located several blocks outside of the district, has been drastically altered on the interior, is closed and soon to be razed.

The theater district had a great economic impact on the Central Business District and numerous restaurants and bars operated in the area to provide hospitality before and after the shows. The Schlitz Palm Garden on Third Street across from the Davidson Theater was the largest and perhaps the most architecturally interesting of the drinking establishments with its barrel vaulted ceiling and profusion of plants. The Gargoyle Restaurant, just a half block away, offered more formal gourmet dining facilities. All of these buildings have been razed.

The Central Business District's role as the entertainment center for the city declined after World War II. Ballrooms fell out of favor, vaudeville died and television replaced the motion picture in popularity. Night spots gravitated toward the suburbs as fewer and fewer people came downtown. Only serious stage productions and classical concerts remained downtown. Something of a renaissance has occurred in recent years, however. The Warner Theater has been refurbished to show movies and the Riverside has been restored and now serves its original purpose of showing live stage shows.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the West Side Commercial Historic District are described as follows: Beginning at the intersection of the north property line of 740 North Plankinton Avenue and the Milwaukee River; then south along the west bank of the river to the north curb line of West Michigan Street; then west to the east curb line of North Plankinton Avenue; then north to the rear building line of 161 West Wisconsin Avenue extended; then west to the west curb line of North 2nd Street; then north to the south building line of 637 North 2nd; then west along the rear building lines of those structures with frontage on West Wisconsin Avenue to the east curb line of North 4th Street; then north to the south curb line of West Wisconsin; then east to the east curb line of North Old World 3rd Street extended; then north to the north property line of 730 Old World Third; then west to the west curb line of the alley; then south to the curb line of the alley; then east to the west curb line of North 2nd; then south to the north curb line of West Wisconsin Avenue; then east to the east curb line of the alley between North Plankinton Avenue and North Second Street; then north to north property line of 725 North Plankinton Avenue, then east along the north building line extended to the east curb line of North Plankinton Avenue; then north to the north property line of 740 North Plankinton Avenue; then east to the point of beginning in the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the West Side Commercial Historic District are clearly suggested by the concentration of major retail and office buildings that are between the two major department stores, Gimbels (No. 4) and Boston Store (No. 13) as oriented toward the Grand Avenue Retail Center along West Wisconsin Avenue. The district is set apart from the surrounding area by changes in land use, building character and building use. Along the east boundary of the district is the Milwaukee River; along the north boundary are a series of surface parking lots, parking garages and vacant lots that separates the district from other existing commercial uses; along the west boundary is the modern Reuss Federal Plaza and parking garage, west of Boston Store; there is vacant land; along the south boundary is a wall of parking garages built for the Grand Avenue Retail Center.

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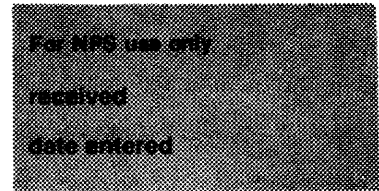
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PRESERVATION ACTIVITY

With the Grand Avenue Retail Center development begun in 1980 and completed in 1982, Milwaukee experienced the greatest single reuse of historic buildings. The facades of the Plankinton Arcade (No. 5), Majestic Building (No. 9), S.S. Kresge Co. (No. 8) and Matthews Bros (No. 11) were restored to resemble their original appearance. The interior of the Plankinton Arcade which was greatly altered in the 1950s and 1960s was also restored to its original appearance and use as an enclosed shopping center. This project prompted the refurbishing of the former Warner Theater (No. 18) (now Grand Cinemas) and the restoration of the Riverside Theater (No. 3) in the Empire Building.

In 1978 a number of commercial properties in the West Wisconsin Avenue area were officially Determined Eligible for listing in the NRHP as a result of a Section 106-compliance project involving the City of Milwaukee.

The properties determined eligible include:

Boston Store	331 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Gimbles	101 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Majestic Building	231 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Mathews Bros. Building	301 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Plankinton Arcade	161 W. Wisconsin Avenue

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FOOTNOTES #8

¹John G. Gregory, History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin 4 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clark Pub. Co., 1931), 1:37.

²William G. Bruce, History of Milwaukee 3 vols. (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1922), 1:86.

³Jerome A. Watrons, ed., Memoirs of Milwaukee County 3 vols. (Madison: Western Historical Association, 1909), 1:32-33.

⁴Kathleen Neils Conzen, Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 12. Bayrd Still, Milwaukee: History of a City (Madison: State Historical Society, 1948), pp. 13-15, 24-25, 37.

⁵Still, Milwaukee, p. 19, 36; John W. Reys, The Making of Urban America: History of City Planning in the United States (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 294, 364.

⁶Increase Lapham, Wisconsin: Its Geography and Topography (Milwaukee: I.A. Hopkins, 1846; reprinted., 1975), p. 113.

⁷Still, Milwaukee, pp. 23-24, 97.

⁸Conzen, Immigrant Milwaukee, p. 138; James Buck, Pioneer History of Milwaukee, 4 vols. (Milwaukee: Milwaukee News Co., 1876-1886), 1:22, 45, 47-48, 183, 280; Still, Milwaukee, p. 66.

⁹Buck, Pioneer, 1:79, 281.

¹⁰Gregory, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2:652.

¹¹Gregory, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1:422.

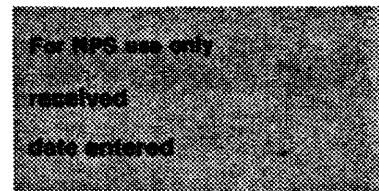
¹²Gregory, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2:654.

¹³Ibid., 2:654-655.

¹⁴Ibid., 2:644, 660.

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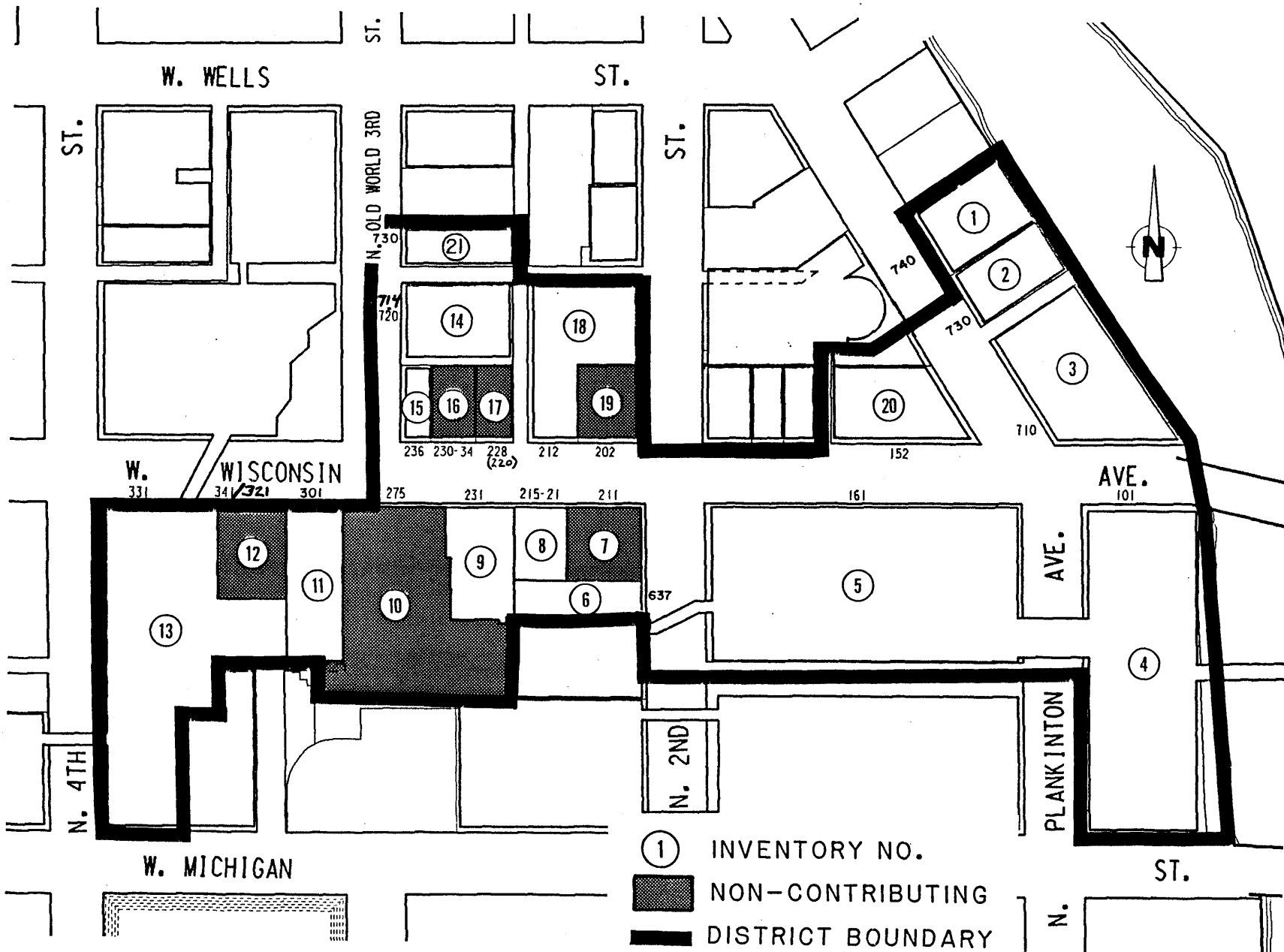
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WEST SIDE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT



United States Department of the 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 any 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: West Side Commercial Historic District

other names/site number _____

=====

2. Location

=====

Street & Number: see Inventory

City or Town: Milwaukee

State: Wisconsin Code: WI County: Milwaukee Code: 079

=====

4. National Park Service Certification

=====

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

x Carol D. Shull 12-22-00

See continuation sheet.

_____ determined eligible for the
National Register

See continuation sheet.

_____ determined not eligible for the
National Register

_____ removed from the National Register

_____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action



State Historical Society of Wisconsin

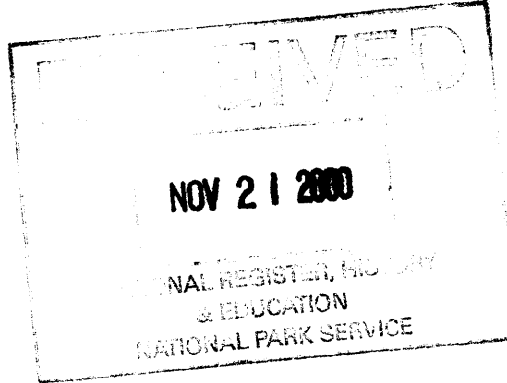
816 State Street ♦ Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1482 ♦ 608/264-6400 ♦ Fax: 264-6404

Division of Historic Preservation
608/264-6500

1590

Removal of owner objection

Carol Shull
Keeper, National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
1849 C St., NW
Mail Stop 2280
Washington, DC 20240



November 16, 2000

Dear Ms. Shull:

On 25 June 1986 the West Side Commercial Historic District (Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin) was Determined Eligible by the National Park Service due to owner objection. The Historic Preservation Division received a request from some of the property owners to renotify all owners in an attempt to remove the owner objection. Since 1986, a number of the properties have changed ownership. Some of the current owners wish to use the Investment Tax Credit and therefore would like to list the district as soon as possible.

After consultation with your office, all of the current owners were renotified on 10 October 2000 and allowed 30 days to object to listing before we submitted this request for removal of owner objection to your office. To date we have received only one objection. This objection, as well as other supportive correspondence, is enclosed. Because of the change in sentiment among a majority of owners, we request that the owner objection be removed and that the West Side Commercial Historic District be officially listed in the National Register. Please ask your staff to notify us as soon as possible after the formal listing so that we may inform several of the property owners that are undertaking rehabilitation projects.

If you have any questions, please call Jim Draeger at (608) 264-6511.

Sincerely,

Alicia Geohring
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Wisconsin

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: ~~004590~~ 74003462

Date Listed: 12/22/2000

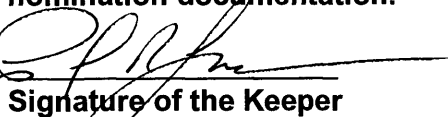
West Side Commercial Historic District
Property Name

Milwaukee
County

WI
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

1/2/2001
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Resource Count:

The correct resource count as described in the nomination includes:
15 contributing buildings and 6 noncontributing buildings.

These revisions were confirmed with Daina Penkiunas of WI SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)