

◆ BIG BULL FALLS ◆
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WAUSAU

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◆ A Guide to Wausau's Historic Downtown Buildings ◆

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By Paul D. Svetlik

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals:

James A. Mijal: Map Design
Chad D. Sauter: Photography

Many thanks go out to Librarian Gary Gisselman for providing invaluable knowledge on the history of Wausau, for editing each narrative, and for composing the introduction.

Thanks also to Director Mary Forer for designing and establishing an online version of this booklet.

This project was funded completely by a grant from the Wisconsin Historical Society and Wisconsin Public Television as part of the Wisconsin Hometown Stories: Wausau project.

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INTRODUCTION

When George Stevens came to Big Bull Falls and settled on the east side of the Wisconsin River little did he know that this ground would grow into a city, and this city would come to be called downtown Wausau. And, that this downtown would continually bring together and hold the spiritual, civic, cultural, commercial, medical, educational, and residential life of the area to this day. It was the center of Wausau, from where all growth would spread: to the south, to the north, and across the rickety bridges to the west side. The downtown is still alive with evidences of that vibrant history.

Through the years since George Stevens, the landscape of the downtown has changed. The population grew—the city expanded—change was inevitable. The biggest development was the building of the Wausau Center Mall in the early 1980's. A lot of the city went under the wrecking ball. Gone are the merchants, taverns, bowling alleys, restaurants, and auto dealerships—replaced with an eight square block shopping center.

While many buildings are now gone, many more historic buildings remain and continue to give Wausau a sense of character and place in central Wisconsin. Enjoy the tour! When finished, you will have witnessed the history and culture of downtown Wausau.

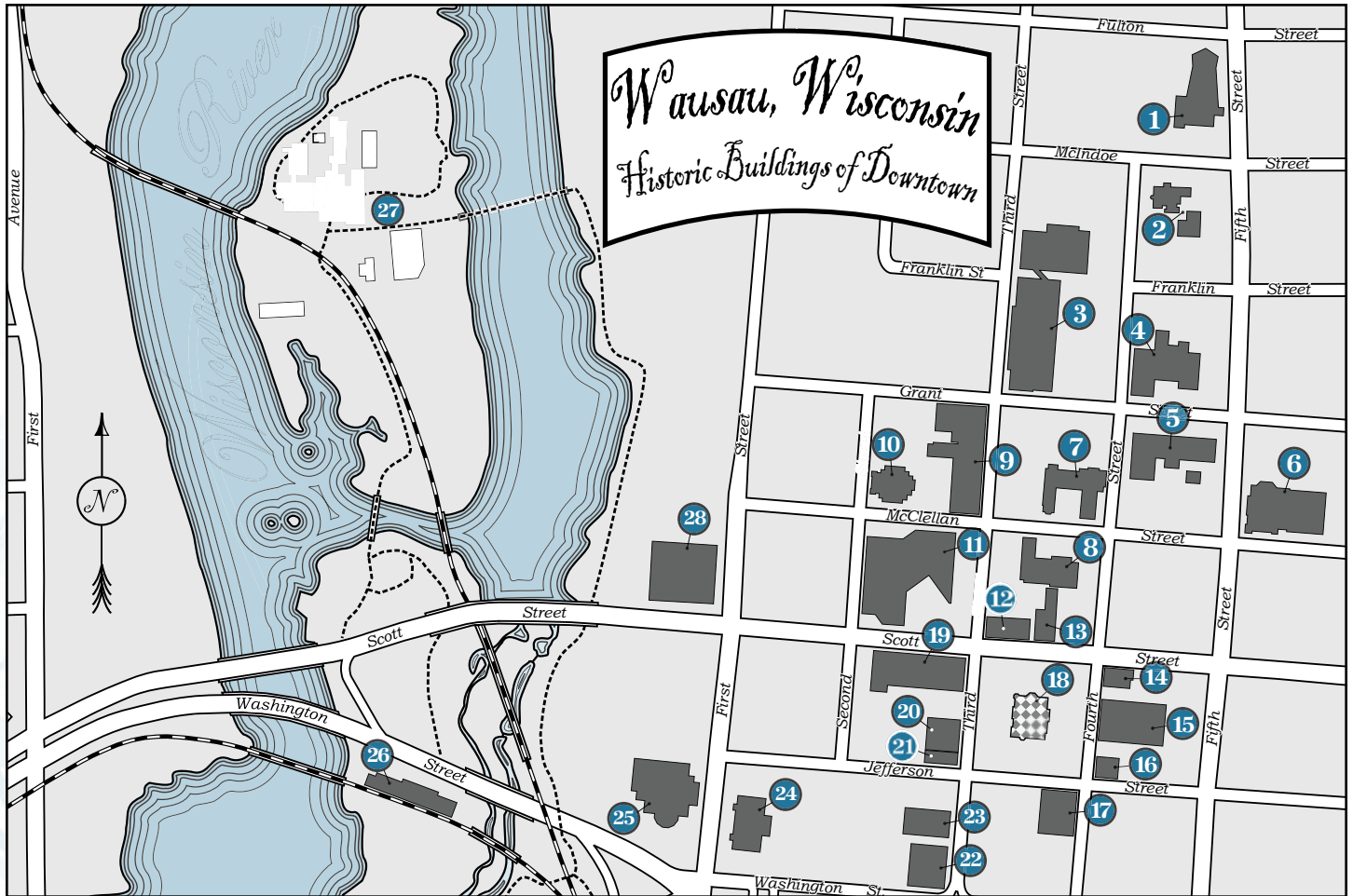
— *Gary Gisselman*

Properties Identified by Historic Names

- 1. A. P. and Leigh Yawkey Woodson House**
410 McIndoe Street ♦ 1914
- 2. Yawkey House**
403 McIndoe Street ♦ 1901
- 3. YMCA**
707 Third Street ♦ 1962
- 4. First Presbyterian Church**
406 Grant Street ♦ 1927
- 5. Employers Mutual**
407 Grant Street ♦ 1940
- 6. Saint Stephen Lutheran Church**
502 McGlellan Street ♦ 1919
- 7. Episcopal Church of John the Baptist**
330 McGlellan Street ♦ 1867, 1914, 1922
- 8. Wausau Club**
309 McGlellan Street ♦ 1901
- 9. 600 Block West Side Third Street**
West Side Third Street ♦ 1890–1933
- 10. Saint James Catholic Church**
621 Second Street ♦ 1911–1912
- 11. First American Center**
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- 12. McCrossen Block**
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- 13. Pilot Building**
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- 21. Marathon County Bank**
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- 22. Livingston Winkelman Building**
300 Third Street ♦ 1904
- 23. Bee Hive Store**
318–324 Third Street ♦ 1884
- 24. Federal Building**
317 First Street ♦ 1901
- 25. Marathon County Public Library**
400 First Street ♦ 1907
- 26. Chicago and Northwestern Depot**
209 West Washington Street ♦ 1899
- 27. Barker Stewart Island**
- 28. Dudley Tower**
Northwest Corner of First and Scott Streets
2005–2007

MAP KEY

-  Historic Site
-  Existing Building
-  Non-Existing Building
-  Walking Trail
-  Railroad
-  Roadway



1

A. P. and Leigh Yawkey Woodson House

410 McIndoe Street ♦ 1914



In 1911 the daughter of Cyrus and Alice Yawkey married A.P. Woodson. Together, Leigh and A.P. moved here from Kansas City in 1914 and built this house across from her parents' home. Designed by Chicago architect George W. Maher in the Prairie School style, it has a horizontally-oriented low pitched roof, wide eaves, and ribbon windows. Woodson, taking after his father-in-law, was an active business leader and philanthropist in Wausau. Following her parents deaths, Leigh and A.P. moved to the east hill district of the city and sold the house to the Immanuel Baptist Church. In 1995 the Marathon County Historical Society purchased the residence. It is currently undergoing renovations to be completed in October of 2010.

2

Yawkey House

403 McIndoe Street ♦ 1901



Cyrus and Alice Yawkey built this Classical Revival style house. Mr. Yawkey, one of the most influential men in Wausau as a lumber baron, an industrialist, and a philanthropist contributed much to the city's industrial vitality. His house, designed by architects Van Ryn and De Gelleke of Milwaukee has ionic columns and a pedimented portico. In 1907 Chicago architect George W. Maher introduced an Arts and Crafts motif to the interior, sympathetic to the original design. A portion of the glass work was done by the Tiffany studios. Mr. Yawkey died in 1943, and his wife died in 1953, at which time the house was deeded to the Marathon County Historical Society for use as their headquarters. In 2008 the house was remodeled as a museum reminiscent of the early 1900's.



YMCA 1893 • Scott Street



YMCA 1908 • Third Street

In 1891, forty seven years after the YMCA was first established in London, England, a branch was organized in Wausau. By 1893 their first secure home was built at the corner of Fourth and Scott Street and it accommodated some 270 members in 1894. By 1908 the YMCA moved to the corner of Grant and Third Streets, and the Wausau Record-Herald moved into the Scott Street building. The YMCA served the Wausau community during the mid-1900's with the mission: "To bring within its range an uplifting influence to the young men of the city and community." In 1962, with the support of the Woodson family, the current building was constructed. Designed by the local architect George E. Foster, the structure features beige brick on top, and Fond du Lac stone on the lower portions.

"This new building, with an 18 x 40 foot pool, a gym 53 feet by 68 feet and 27 dormitory rooms became the social center of Wausau."

— Wausau Daily Record Herald reports on 1908 building

4

First Presbyterian Church

406 Grant Street ♦ 1927



The first organizational meeting for this parish was held in 1858. For a time, the small congregation met in a variety of places around Wausau. However, in 1877 their first permanent church was erected at 206 McClellan Street. This structure was replaced in 1896 with a new church located on Grant Street. During the first two decades of the 20th century, the congregation grew rapidly and in 1927 the second church was replaced with this English Gothic style structure designed by Chicago architects Childs and Smith. It is faced with sandstone from a Stevens Point quarry, and trimmed with limestone.

5

Employers Mutual

407 Grant Street ♦ 1940



*Wisconsin State Seal
at top of building.*

As Wausau entered the 20th century, the era of lumbering upon which the foundation of the city was built, and the economy depended, was at an end. The decline of lumbering proved to be a momentous shift in Wausau's industrial makeup. Perhaps the most influential factor in the transition from lumber to other business and industry was the formation of the Wausau Group in 1899. Their most successful innovation was Employers Mutual Liability Insurance formed on September 21, 1911 in response to the state workers' compensation law passed that year. Over the next thirty years the company grew exponentially, and in 1940 this new building was constructed for their headquarters. Chicago architects Childs and Smith designed this Art Deco style structure built of limestone which features metal grillwork, art glass windows, and state seals at the roofline. The firm continued to expand through the purchase of insurance organizations across the country. This conglomeration came to be known as Wausau Insurance Companies. In 1967 they moved to the west side of Wausau, and the city purchased the building for a city hall.

6

Saint Stephen Lutheran Church

502 McClellan Street ♦ 1919



In 1881, Rev. Reinicke of Saint Paul's Evangelical Congregation left that parish with a group of parishioners and together formed this German Evangelical Lutheran Church. Their first building was an 1872 structure purchased from the Universalist Church in 1882. It was demolished in 1909 and in its place, designed by Milwaukee architect Anton Dohmen, stands the current Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church of 1910. Spires of unequal height, a triple arch entrance, and the many pinnacles result in a High Victorian Gothic citation.

7

Episcopal Church of Saint John the Baptist

330 McClellan Street ♦ 1867, 1914, 1922



Walter McIndoe deeded land to the Episcopal Church of Saint John in the Wilderness led by Rev. Thomas Greene in 1858. Construction began that year, but went unfinished and a windstorm in 1863 destroyed what had been completed. After serving in the Civil War, Rev. Greene resumed construction of the wood framed church which was completed in 1867. By 1914 the church was replaced with a new Tudor Revival structure built of Hatley field stone and designed by the Wausau firm Speer and Swarthout. The name was also updated to Saint John the Baptist, reflecting that Wausau at this time was no longer a wilderness. A stone stucco parish house designed by Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay was added on the west side of the property in 1922. The guild hall, connecting the church and the parish house, sheathed in stone, is the original 1867 building.

Wausau Club

309 McClellan Street ♦ 1901



Wausau Club 1901



Wausau Club 2010

The prominent men of Wausau organized this club in 1901 as stated in the bylaws to “Promote the business interests of the city of Wausau and for the social enjoyment of its members.” They did just that. Through the actions of members like Cyrus Yawkey and D.C. Everest, modern day Wausau began to take shape. Although women were initially prohibited, evidence suggests there were “ladies” days as early as 1911. The bylaws also banished alcohol and tobacco from the club and its many parties until the 1930’s when prohibition was lifted. However, to what extent these rules were enforced is of question. The Wausau Club house, designed by architect J.H. Jeffers of Wausau, is Neo-Classical in design. Boasting the original ionic columns which support a classical pediment over the main entrance, additions were completed in 1912 and 1922 which created a kitchen, billiards hall, and a 16 room dormitory. Visited by such people as Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Wausau Club was, for many years, the place to belong to in Wausau. It closed its doors in 2005 as a result of decreased membership. The house has remained vacant since that time.

“I have no way to prove it, but I’ll lay at odds it was a drinking club from the beginning.”

— Bart Kellnhauser, interviewed for *‘Wausau Club: Great Times 1901-1999, The Story of the Wausau Club’* by James Elliot.

9

600 Block West Side Third Street

West Side Third Street ♦ 1890–1933

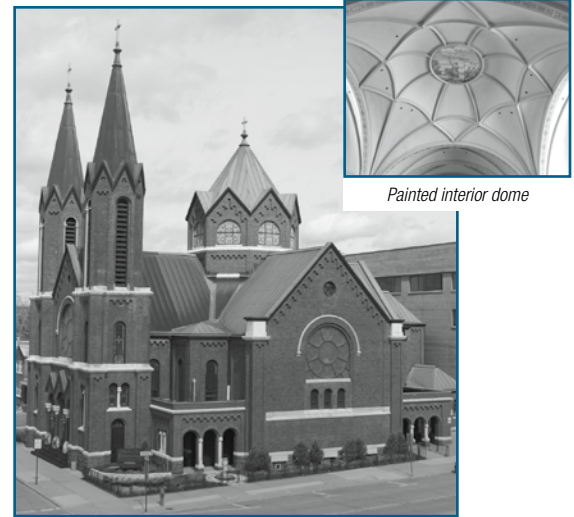


This portion of downtown Wausau is now the finest collection of late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings in the area. It is the only example of an unbroken block face, representative of an earlier era of commercial architecture. These properties originally housed food stores, clothing shops, furniture dealers, and one of the first theatres: The Majestic. The styles of architecture represented here include: a Queen Anne structure by Wausau architect Phillip Dean at 630, an Italianate by Dean at 604–606, a Tudor Revival by Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay at 614 and a Commercial style building at 608.

10

Saint James Catholic Church

621 Second Street ♦ 1911–1912



Painted interior dome

By the early 1900's the English language was gaining prevalence in Wausau and the surrounding localities. Catholic Church sermons however, were only held in German at Saint Mary's and in Polish at Saint Michael's. Thus, in 1905 Saint James Parish was organized as the first English speaking Catholic parish in Wausau. By 1911 the congregation required a larger church, and funds were raised for its construction. Milwaukee architect Anton Dohmen incorporated both Gothic and Romanesque styles into the new church consisting of a central interior dome and identical exterior towers at the entrance. On September 21, 1911, two workers from Marks Brother's Construction Company were killed when the central dome collapsed. Construction continued, and the church was completed in 1912.

First American Center

500 Block West Third Street ♦ 1974



American National Bank 1924



First American Center 2010

The terms international and brutalism best describe the style of this seven story building designed by Flad & Associates of Madison. Of the terms, the latter is derived from the French phrase “Breton Brut” meaning raw or rough art. Indeed, constructed of limestone covered concrete and glass, this structure embodies the unrefined. Since 1892, this location has been the site of financial institutions. The first was the German American Bank. Hostilities against Germany during WWI prompted a name change to American National Bank. In 1924, a new building, designed in the Renaissance Revival form by Chicago architects Childs and Smith replaced the 1892 structure. The American National Bank merged with the Marathon County Bank in 1929 and with the First National Bank of Wausau in 1933. The name was changed to First American National Bank in 1964. Ten years later, the building was razed for the current financial institution.

12

McCrossen Block

501 Third Street ♦ 1875



Wausau's oldest remaining commercial building was home to James McCrossen's general store from 1875-1892. Originally built as a brick Italianate Commercial structure, a 1950 fire destroyed much of the original integrity. One of the first murders in the city is said to have occurred on the second floor of this building in the office of Dr. E.L. Hagel, a dentist from Stevens Point. At this time there was only one dentist in Wausau, Dr. J.C. Bennet. When Hagel arrived in 1880, Bennet promptly rid himself of the unwanted competition by ending Hagel's life with a shotgun blast. Bennet was found guilty of murder, and sentenced to life in prison.

13

Pilot Building

324 Scott Street ♦ 1901



Pilot Building 1890

Valentine Ringle began publication of Wausau's second newspaper in 1865, a weekly called the *Wisconsin River Pilot*. Eugene B. Thayer purchased the firm in 1884 and renamed it the *Wausau Pilot Review*, later the *Wausau Pilot*. As early as 1890 the paper was located at 324 Scott Street housed in a small wood framed structure. However, in 1901 Wausau architect Phillip Dean designed a new Commercial style building with an arched central bay for the publication at the same location. At this time, the paper was known for printing Thayer's personal recollections of Wausau's early years. By 1920, Thayer's son, Eugene Jr. was conducting the operations of the paper. The J.C. Penney store moved into the first floor beneath the Pilot in 1915. Printing came to a stop in 1940, and by 1961 Shepherd & Schaller Sports owned the structure.

14

Wisconsin Valley Trust Company

427 Fourth Street ♦ 1908



Wausau Attorneys Andrew Kruetzer, Claire Bird, and Marvin Rosenberry had this structure built for their enterprise: Wisconsin Valley Trust Company. Designed by architects Van Ryn and De Gelleke of Milwaukee, this Neo-Classical Revival building flaunts arched windows, a cornice decorated with dentils, and a parapet at the roofline. Considered very elaborate, it was toured by some 2000 Wausau residents upon its completion. The firm dissolved in 1938, after which the building was leased by law firms and insurance companies until 1972 when the Wausau Area Chamber of Commerce moved in. The Grand Theatre Foundation purchased it in 1988 and since that time it has been home to the Center for Visual Arts.

15

Grand Theatre

415 Fourth Street ♦ 1927



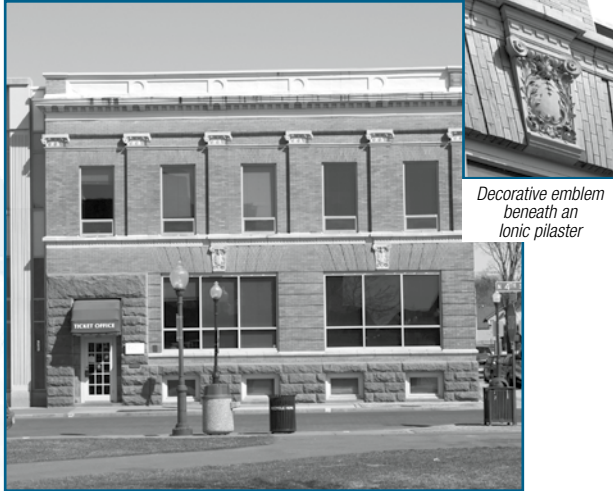
*Palladian window
& Adamesque urns.*

Pictured here is Wausau's pride and joy: The Grand Theatre. Since its debut film "Dress Parade" on Thanksgiving Day 1927, the Grand has been alive with entertainment. Similar to other theatres of the era, this magnificent Neo-Classical Revival structure is heavily clad in ornament including colossal pilasters, Adamesque urns and garland, a Palladian window, and a parapet at the roofline. The triumphant exterior pays complement to the elegant interior which accommodates an audience of over one thousand. Designed by architects Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay, it was built due to the growing interest in vaudeville productions in the 1920's and replaced the former Grand Opera House of 1900 at the same location. In 1987 the Grand underwent a community sponsored restoration to maintain its grandeur which attracts Broadway shows, concerts, and local productions. From the beginning, the Grand Theatre has maintained the motto under which it was constructed: "The best is none too good for Wausau."

16

Wausau Gas Light and Coke Company

401 Fourth Street ♦ 1901



*Decorative emblem
beneath an
ionic pilaster*

From 1901 – 1925 the Wausau Gas Light and Coke Company provided service out of this facility. Established in 1884, this firm provided gas for the city's initial street and interior light systems. Within ten years however, electricity powered the street lights, and by the mid-1920's electricity was standard in most indoor applications as well. Phillip Dean of Wausau designed the building, and like the other structures on the block, it is a fine example of the Neo-Classical Revival style. The ionic pilasters, denticulated cornice, decorative emblems, and the parapet at the roofline all contribute to the classical citation. Contractor John Gritzmacher incorporated both brick and Wausau granite into the structure's exterior facings. After 1925 the building was occupied by law firms and businesses. It is currently owned by the Performing Arts Foundation.

17

Wisconsin Public Service Building

330 Fourth Street ♦ 1941–1942



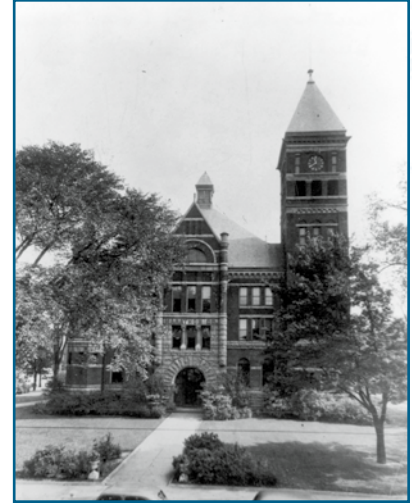
*Fleur-de-lis, circles,
and scallops in
aluminum above the
door. Fluted pilasters
flank the entrance.*

Architects Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay drew up the plans for this building for the local utility firm in 1941. Designed with trademark Art Deco style motifs, it is an excellent example of that style of architecture which was popularized in the late 1920's. The fluted pilasters and geometrical facings of limestone and glass block provide the building with a tame, but futuristic look often associated with the machine age between the two world wars. From 1929 – 1941 the American Legion club house was situated at this site. The building is currently occupied by the engineering firm of Becher-Hoppe.

Courthouse Square



Courthouse 1868



Courthouse 1892

Courthouse square was purchased in 1853 for \$100 from Walter McIndoe for the erection of a county office building and was home to the area's courthouses for over a century. The first structure built on this parcel was completed in 1854, and replaced the original county clerk's office of 1851. The new county office building, like the former, failed to meet the needs of the county's rapid settlement. The building was razed and a third courthouse was completed in 1868. Built as a two story Greek Revival frame structure, it was the first to include a courtroom.

In 1892 a significantly larger courthouse was built. Designed by Milwaukee architect H.C. Koch, it was of the Richardson Romanesque style. Contractor John Miller, using Marathon County brick and granite completed the courthouse for \$65,000. Judge Louis Marchetti wrote of this building that it "far surpasses anything previously done in that line in former years." Indeed, the courthouse not only represented a new era of architectural ingenuity in Wausau, but also embodied the essence of Marathon County's growing vitality. In 1955, the current functional courthouse situated at 500 Forest Street was built and in that same year the 1892 structure was demolished from courthouse square for a block of retail stores. The square was cleared in 2002.

19

Hotel Wausau

221 Scott Street ◆ 1924



Cornice pediment with a "W" for Wausau

Chicago Architects Holabird and Roche, important in the development of the skyscraper form, drew the plans for this eight story brick covered Classical Revival style hotel. It includes arcaded windows on the ground floor and a pediment at the roofline with urns, balustrades, and a "W" for Wausau. In the 1970's the hotel was turned into residential units, shops, and a restaurant. The original chandelier still hangs inside the ballroom. At this location, built in the early 1880's by George Bellis, and later demolished was the Hotel Bellis.

20

Mayer Lotz

408-410 Third Street ◆ 1929-1930



Business partners Charles B. Mayer, a local shoe store owner, and Carl Lotz of Lotz Sand and Gravel built this structure in 1929 strictly as a real estate investment. Designed in the Chicago Commercial style, it features a touch of Art Deco near the roofline, geometric capitals and engraved columns. McClellan's Five and Dime store leased the building from Mayer and Lotz through 1959, and since that time it has been occupied by various retail businesses, offices, and restaurants. Prior to this building, the location was home to the offices of physicians, the county coroner, and clothing stores.

Marathon County Bank

402 Third Street ♦ 1874, 1892, 1925



Marathon County Bank 1892



Balustrade atop the cornice.



Marathon County Bank 1925

The banking business emerged in the city during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to facilitate financial transactions in a time of growing prosperity and commerce. The first institution, the Bank of the Interior, opened in 1858 and merged with the newly formed Marathon County Bank in 1874 in a solid brick building at 402 Third Street. A new bank building constructed of Marathon County Red Granite was built here in 1892 and served until 1925 when the bank was updated to the current Neo-Classical design. The Wausau Pilot reported that year, "Finished in white Bedford stone with massive columns, in conformance with the latest ideas of modern bank construction; the architectural design presents both an imposing and substantial appearance." Inside, a vault with double combination locks, triple timed locks, and wired alarms protected the patrons' interests. The bank merged with American National Bank and moved to the 500 block of Third Street. From 1929-1982 Mayer's shoe store occupied the building after which a variety of stores and offices moved in. The building now houses Sartori Creative.

"The new vault is constructed of steel and concrete, 27 inches in thickness on top, bottom, and sides."

— Wausau Pilot, 1925

Livingston Winkelman Building

300 Third Street ♦ 1904



Livingston Department Store 1904



Washington Square 2010

Jacob Kolter's Music Hall was first built here in 1869. A place for concerts and theatre acts, the hall was the destination for performance enthusiasts until 1883 when the Wausau Opera House opened. By 1895 attendance at the music hall had declined so drastically that the structure was demolished. Phillip Dean designed a two story Commercial style structure at this location for Samuel and Charles Livingston's department store in 1904. The business changed ownership in 1911 when Samuel Winkelman arrived from Michigan and purchased it from the Livingston's, giving it his name. As Wausau grew, so did the store. Samuel's son Cassius added a third story with a band of chevrons and W's for Winkelman in 1936. The building remained property of the Winkelman family until 1970 when the Johnson Hills store purchased it, and significantly altered the interior and exterior appearance. A 1983 renovation restored the original integrity of the building now called Washington Square.

23

Bee Hive Store

318–324 Third Street ♦ 1884



The Heinemann brothers built this three story brick structure and named it the Bee Hive store. On January 21, 1886, electric light was first used in the city of Wausau in this building. The Wausau Pilot reported, "Third Street, in the vicinity of Heinemann Brother's store, is as light as day, made so from the ten electric lights in front of that mammoth establishment." In 1895 Charles and Samuel Livingston purchased the business and operated it through 1904 when they relocated down the street to what is now Washington Square. The Bee Hive building's round headed windows on the third story, rectangular windows on the second floor, and metal cornice at the entrance all indicate a Commercial Vernacular style. The first story has been significantly modified, however. Since 1904 there have been a variety of retail stores and offices in the building.

24

Federal Building

317 First Street ♦ 1937



Built for the post office and the federal courtroom, this building later became home to congressional offices and several government agencies. On the second floor was the U.S. Marshall's office, complete with a single holding cell for people awaiting trial in the federal courtroom down the hall. The FBI office, protected by a bullet proof door, was also on the second floor. At ground level of this Art Moderne structure designed by Louis A. Simon of the U.S. Office of Supervising Architects in Washington D.C. and Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay was the mail center. In the lobby patrons could view an expressionist mural by Gerrit Sinclair. Distinct marble trim clad with ornament also decorates the area. Below, in the basement, was the office of the IRS. Since 1998, the building has been vacant.

Marathon County Public Library

400 First Street ♦ 1907



Marathon County Public Library 1907



Marathon County Public Library 1995

The first city owned public library opened in 1907 as a result of community pressure, a gift of \$25,000 from Andrew Carnegie, and land donated by Walter Alexander. In April of 1905, Chicago architect George W. Maher submitted plans for the structure to be built by Wausau contractors Miller and Krause. The building was Neo-Classical in design, but several additions significantly modified the original form. A sympathetic second story auditorium designed by architects Oppenhamer and Obel of Wausau and Green Bay expanded the north face in 1928. However, the 1965-68 modifications severely diminished the library's architectural integrity. In 1995, a new library to meet new demands was built, and a small balustrade on the First Street face is all that remains of the 1907 building.

To the south of the library is Library Park. Donated by Walter Alexander, it is a tribute to the "Father of Wausau," Walter McIndoe.

26

Chicago and Northwestern Depot

209 West Washington Street ♦ 1899



The first railroad for passenger and freight use reached Wausau in 1874. The second, in 1880, was the Milwaukee, Lakeshore and Western Railroad which served sawmills on Clark Island, the first settlement in the Wausau area. Two years later, the Chicago and Northwestern railroad acquired that line and took over operations. To facilitate the needs of passengers and lumber companies the Chicago and Northwestern Depot was built in 1899. Designed by Chicago architect G.A. Johnson, this brick building exhibits a double pitched hip roof with canopied extensions, rounded top windows, and gables decorate the center which all lend to a Utilitarian Commercial citation. As railway use declined, the C&NW railway discontinued service in 1954, and the train depot became the city bus depot the same year. It provided bus service until 1966, and since that time the depot has been home to a restaurant and a number of business offices.

27

Barker Stewart Island



Originally called McIndoe Island, this site is home to the only remnants of a 19th century sawmill in the city of Wausau. Clark Johnson and Company built the first mill here in 1881 and operated it until 1887 when C.C. Barker and H.C. Stewart purchased the firm. At this time, much of the white pine forest crop was depleted—a result of intense lumbering in the mid to late 1800's. Therefore, the Barker Stewart Mill cut the remaining hemlock timber and was the county's leading producer of that wood. Operations were terminated in 1915 and the island now serves as a park complete with walking trails, bridges, and interpretative storyboards.

Dudley Tower

Northwest Corner of First and Scott Streets ♦ 2005–2007



Eleven stories in height, this is the tallest building in Wausau, and an impressive addition to the downtown. Its presence represents not only the city's grandeur, but its future as a bustling and growing center of commerce. Built by Dudley Investments, the structure was designed by Mudrovich Architects of Wausau in the Post Modern style. Constructed of concrete, steel, and brick, it features a pyramid and small tower at the top, visible from many points in the surrounding areas.

Just as the Dudley Tower represents the future of the city and of downtown, the tower's location places it in the center of the history of Wausau's downtown. The view from this landmark gives us an easy view of those places in downtown that so influenced the development of this piece of central Wisconsin. The Wisconsin River, Clarke's Island, the site of the first sawmill, and the railroad tracks all recount episodes of history that made its mark on the continually evolving progress of the center of the city called downtown.

If one was to see Central Wisconsin from the Dudley Tower in the early 1830's we would see a land full of white pine trees and a few hardwoods. It was that white pine forest that soon attracted men who saw that there was money to be made in this land of tall trees. George Stevens was one of these early lumber speculators who first came to what was then called Big Bull Falls. Stevens started the first sawmill in 1840 and thus set the scene for the future of Wausau for the rest of the Nineteenth Century. The lure of jobs and of wealth brought on by the timber brought many settlers to this new community.

Many personalities grace the early history of Wausau. One of the most distinguished was Walter McIndoe. A native of Scotland, McIndoe came to Wausau in 1848 and soon made Wausau his home. He so influenced this settlement that he has been labeled the "Father of the City of Wausau." His efforts led to the creation of Marathon County in 1850. He is also credited with changing the name from Big Bull Falls to Wausau and with being a force to bring the railroads to Wausau in 1874.

From meager beginnings in the "Pinery" of Northern Wisconsin, Wausau continued to grow and to depend on the lumbering of white pine. The coming of the railroad in 1874 brought new opportunities for economic development and the ability to travel and ship goods with increased ease. As the century began to wane, the business titans of Wausau saw that white pine was running out and plans had to be made to transition Wausau from sawmills to other industries.

Those civic fathers who by chance were in Wausau at the close of the Nineteenth Century did indeed see the coming to an end of the sawmills and through joint efforts began to invest their wealth into diversified manufacturing and service industries. Their formation of such companies as Marathon Corporation, Employers Insurance, and Wausau Papers proved to guarantee the economic stability of the Wausau area through much of the new century. This vision for what would be a new economy would establish the "Wausau Group" as a key player in the history of Wausau through the rest of the century.

— Gary Gisselman



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For more information on the history of Downtown Wausau contact:

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