

Vallender Building Historic Statement

129-129 State Street, Madison, Wisconsin

By Gary Tipler, March 19, 2012.

Significance

The Vallender Building is a significant example of a rare architectural style in Madison, the Rundbogenstil or American Round Arch Style, a subcategory of the German Romanesque Revival, which was employed by German immigrant architects and builders in the United States. It embodies the characteristics of a German-built structure, reflecting the culture and history of its immigrant entrepreneurial builders, owners and inhabitants, the Vallender family. It is also significant as an increasingly rare building type of its period in Madison -- one that housed both business and residence for its owner. Following its completion, "it was considered to be one of Madison's finest business structures."¹

The Rundbogenstil contrasted the Gothic and Classical styles, popular in the 19th Century. Heinrich Hübsch (1795-1863), the architect who first developed the style, intended for it to portray a noble simplicity and subdued grandeur of neo-classicism, while reflecting the rise of industrialism and an emerging German nationalism – in a style that was distinctly German. Hübsch studied at the University at Heidelberg (1813–15), then Friedrich Weinbrenner's school of architecture in Karlsruhe followed by years of study of buildings in Italy and Greece. Hübsch first coined the term Rundbogenstil in 1822, and published it in his book in 1828, "In What Style Should We Build?" It was part of a greater discussion among German architects of the period, analyzing the future of modern architecture. The style was intended to reflect construction simply, honestly and artistically, to reflect its historic origins, though to take modern German architecture forward without the entrapments of Classical or Gothic design. In 1839, Hübsch designed the Kassel Synagogue in Kassel, Hesse, an important building in the Rundbogenstil. The style was characterized by functional simplicity with flat unadorned walls, rounded arches above windows and doors, and a simple cornice with slight projection and uncomplicated ornamentation.²

The new and 'modern' architectural style was embraced in Germany (Prussia), and in the United States, notably by German immigrant architects of that period.³ It was expressed largely in churches, public buildings and private institutional buildings, but made its way into the design of residential and commercial buildings, as well, whether designed by architect, designer or builder.

Perhaps one of the earliest buildings in the Rundbogenstil to have been built in the United States was the Astor Library on Lafayette Place in New York. It was designed by German-born architect Alexander Saeltzer and built in 1854.

In Madison, the main proponent of the Rundbogenstil was the architectural firm of Donnel and Kutzbock. Born in Bremen, Germany, circa 1814, August Kutzbock, the designer of the firm, came to the United States in 1852 and settled in Western New York, then in Sanduski, Ohio in 1854. After arriving in Madison in 1855, he partnered with Samuel Hunter Donnel, an engineer, who had arrived in Madison the year before, and they began their work together. Their earliest known works in Madison were in 1855 in large residences and commercial

¹ Capital Times, March 5, 1949. Alexius Baas "Flat-iron building at 131 State Street..." In this story, Baas, interviewed his Aunt Elizabeth Schweinem, whose father and brother were Franz and William Vallender.

² Bergdoll, Barry, *European Architecture, 1750-1890*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 184-9.

³ Curran, Kathleen. Dec., 1988. "The German Rundbogenstil and Reflections on the American Round-Arch Style." *Journal of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 47, No. 4: 251-373.

Curran, Kathleen. *The Romanesque Revival : Religion, Politics, and Transnational Exchange*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003. pp.1-89.

buildings, and within a short period of time they were embraced by the great builders and decision makers of Madison and the State. They designed the City Hall on West Mifflin at Wisconsin Avenue (1857) and the Wisconsin State Capitol (1857-1859). They designed the exuberant Rundbogenstil house, 424 North Pinckney Street (1857), for Alexander McDonnell, the contractor for the construction of the Capitol, as a showcase for his work. They employed the Rundbogenstil or German Romanesque Revival style in many of their buildings including the City Hall, the G.A.R Hall and the State Capitol, along with several residences, most of which are gone.

The remaining examples of the Rundbogenstil in Madison are by Kutzbock, who is assumed to have been the creative designer of the team, based on his commissions following Donnell's death in 1861. They are the McDonnell residence at 424 N. Pinckney, the Van Slyke House at 24 East Gilman, both designed during the partnership, the Shaire Shomain Synagogue or "Gates of Heaven" Synagogue, now in James Madison Park, in 1863.⁴ After Donnell's death, Kutzbock practiced alone until the fall of 1864, spent some time in San Francisco, but returned to Madison in the fall of 1867.

Madison's German-speaking community was intimate. Frank Vallender would undoubtedly have known Kutzbock, may well have worked on one of his buildings and may have been influenced by him during his work several years prior to the construction of Vallender's building. It isn't known whether Kutzbock had any involvement in this building design. However, the Vallender Building has an extraordinary architectural presence, given its size and the stature of its owners and their respective businesses.

The Vallender Building is a rare building type in Madison – a mixed-use commercial and residential building built in the 1860s – built by an entrepreneurial owner for both business and space and residence. All but a couple of the commercial examples of that period, 1850s-1860s, are gone from the Capitol Square and only two other ones remain on State Street that are visibly identifiable of the period, the building at 402 State, the George Sherer building (1866) in which the Badger Liquor business is located and the N.A. Brown Building at 414 State (1855). Another is the building at 128-130 State Street, though it was remodeled in 1928-29, in a design by Frank Riley.⁵ The Willett Main building at 103 State wasn't built for owner residency and is a similar kind of building, though designed in a classical style.

Historically, the Vallender Building embodies the characteristics of a German-built structure, reflecting the culture and history of the immigrant entrepreneurs, Frank and William Vallender. It was hand built of locally quarried sandstone and the increasingly rare locally made vermilion-colored red brick. Buildings built of that brick were once more commonly found in older areas that have been undergoing redevelopment, thus most have been demolished.

Building Description

The Vallender Building was built in two stages, on Lot 1 of Block 76, with the eastern part of the building being built first, as a two-and-a-half-story building.⁶ It is likely that the expansion of the second stage, occupying the corner and the full third floor was begun once it

⁴ Capital Times, "Design of Synagogue Here Is Identified" January 11, 1971. p.16. Ada Louise Huxtable, New York Times architecture critic weighed in on the Gates of Heaven Synagogue in Madison.

⁵ Miller, Elizabeth for City of Madison, State Street Historic District National Register of Historic Places nomination. (1997).

⁶ 1867 City Tax List, p.31, 1867 Special Tax List p. 29, and 1868 Tax List, p.63.

became apparent that the apartment wouldn't be large enough. William's son Frank W. was born during that year, and Frank (Sr.) was likely considering retiring from masonry and intended to open a tavern in the corner commercial space.

The building was built with a locally quarried sandstone rubble foundation with an entrance stair within the N. Fairchild Street right-of-way. The masonry bearing wall in the basement separates the basement into two rooms. The balance of the building was built with vermilion colored brick, possibly made in John George Ott's brickyard on East Wilson Street.⁷ It is a soft red brick that has exhibited some deterioration on the Fairchild Street side, likely due to airborne road salt and greater sun exposure, which causes considerably more freeze-thaw cycles than the State Street side of the building. On the State Street side very little deterioration above the splash line above the sidewalk can be found. The building was last painted prior to 1994, but the date is unknown. The paint is in poor or moderate condition and exhibits peeling.

The State Street façade of the building consists of two individually built sets of brick piers and window bays for the east and the west side of the facade. The widths of the piers and bays are slightly different for each side of the State Street façade. The window and (original) door bays or fields are inset from the piers. Each of the masonry openings for windows and doors, according to historic photos, had a half-round arch of the same red brick, corbelled to have a slight protrusion. The two storefronts were altered, the east half of the façade was altered by jeweler Ernest Templin in his 1946 alteration to install a display window and new entrance on the east side of the façade for his store. A similar storefront alteration was undertaken many years later on the west side of the building. The masonry arches of the west side of the ground floor façade have been exposed at the time of signage changes a couple times in past decades. They remain intact above the steel beam that was inserted to create the storefront opening. The exterior wooden stair to the second floor was removed in the 1946 alteration and most of the old window and door masonry openings in the Fairchild Street were infilled with brick. The date of the existing steel fire escape is unknown. The small rear entrance enclosure was added in the mid-1980s when the apartments were again renovated for use.

The roof is a low-pitched hipped roof with a ridge over the east part of the building, almost unseen from the street. The minimally ornamented brick parapet wall of the State Street façade hides it from view on that side.

The integrity of the building is quite strong. It is largely intact except for the removal of some of the first floor masonry piers. Most of the alterations are easily reversible. The storefront alterations do not significantly detract from the building's historic character. The building was determined to be a contributing building in the State Street National Register Historic District nomination in the 1990s.

Vallender Family

Franz Vallender was born in Germany (Prussia) in 1815.⁸ His family had been farmers. With his wife Maria Sophia, son Wilhelm (12), son Mathias (8) and infant Margaretha, less than a year old, he left Prussia and traveled, via Antwerp, Belgium aboard the Centurion, and arrived

⁷ Vallenders undoubtedly knew Ott, a neighbor and leader in the largely German neighborhood centered along the west end of Williamson, Jenifer and Spaight Streets.

⁸ 1900 Census.

in New York on May 3, 1852.⁹ Franz changed his name to Frank and worked as a stone mason.¹⁰

When Frank Vallender first arrived in Madison in 1852 he bought property on which a house was built the 800 block of Jenifer Street, then listed as No.12 Jenifer, later renumbered 833. It is a house in which he lived until the 1890s, and in which some members of his family lived or owned into the 1930s. Three other houses were later built on other parts of the lot.

On May 4, 1864, Frank Vallender bought the triangular corner lot on State Street at Fairchild for \$400 from Benjamin Franklin Hopkins, a real estate speculator.¹¹ It is believed that he built the east side of the building as a two-and-a-half-story building but had a change of plans.¹² By the end of 1867, he completed an addition comprising a full third story above the building and the triangular corner addition. The factors that contributed to the expansion of the building would have been to primarily provide a larger living space for his son's growing family and to house both their respective businesses, a saloon for himself (east side of building) and a barbershop for his son William at the corner.¹³ Franz was getting on in years and likely planned an alternative to the masonry business. His saloon was listed as being located at No. 15 State Street in the 1868 city directory and his son's barbershop was listed as being at the intersection, later No. 17 State Street.¹⁴

Frank Vallender was listed as working as a laborer as late as the 1895 city directory, but in his later years reverted to his original name, Franz, at a time during which he became blind and lived at 325 W. Mifflin with his daughter Elizabeth Schweinem.¹⁵

In his death announcement on December 17, 1900, Frank Vallender was credited with his work as a mason on several prominent buildings including the Federal courthouse and post office that once stood on East Mifflin at Wisconsin Avenue.¹⁶

Wilhelm Vallender was born in Cologne Germany (Prussia) in about 1840, to Franz "Frank" and Sophia Terressa Vallender.¹⁷ Upon arriving in the United States with his parents and siblings in 1852, he changed his name to William. He had been a farmer and later became a barber who had his shop in the State Street building immediately following its completion in 1868, and moved with his wife, two daughters Margaret and Sophia, and infant son Frank William into the apartment above his shop.¹⁸ The two-level apartment above was accessed via

⁹ Germans To America, Lists of Passengers Arriving At U.S. Ports 1850-1855, Vol. 2, May 1851-June 1852, p.315.

¹⁰ 1858 City directory.

¹¹ Warrantee Deed dated May 4, 1864 for Lot 1, Block 76, City of Madison, a lot measuring 44 feet along State Street and 54 feet along Fairchild Street.

¹² Tax Rolls indicated a value of \$850 for the year 1866, which more than doubled its value, indicating that a small building had likely been built on the site.

¹³ Wisconsin State Journal, "Building in Madison." March 25, 1868. Buildings erected in 1867, a list provided by W.T. Fish, a builder of principal buildings built during the previous year.

Wisconsin State Journal, "Mrs. Schweinem, 90 on Monday, Is Oldest Worshipper at Holy Redeemer," Madison, Wisconsin, March 26, 1944. p.9. Elizabeth Schweinem recounts that her father built the State Street building and was a stone mason.

¹⁴ Madison City Directories. In the original street numbering system, addresses were listed as the numbers of buildings on the street rather than by numbered blocks. That was changed to the present system in 1883.

¹⁵ 1898-99 city directory, Franz Vallender listed. He was last listed in the 1900-1901 City Directory at 325 W. Mifflin, along with his daughter Elizabeth Schweinem.

¹⁶ Wisconsin State Journal, December 17, 1900. "F. Vallender Dead." p.8.

¹⁷ 1900 Census.

¹⁸ Tax rolls. City directories.

an exterior wood stair and balcony on the Fairchild side of the building. In 1874, he was elected foreman of the Andrew Proudfit Engine Co., No. 2, located next door, which had been formed in 1857. The engine company was named after Mayor Proudfit.¹⁹ William Vallender served as volunteer firemen for many years with the largely German-speaking fire company. In 1875-76, William Vallender served on the County Board of Supervisors.²⁰ After his wife died in the mid-1890s, he remarried, continued to operate his barbershop until around 1911 when he retired and lived in the building until his death in 1921.²¹ His wife Anna (Mayer) lived there until her death in 1935.

Frank William Vallender, William's son, was born in 1866, at around the time that the expansion of the Vallender Building was being planned. As a young man, and perhaps because of his father's work as a volunteer fireman, Frank W. also became a fireman. During the course of his service, he was elevated to the position of Fire Captain of the Fire Station No. 2 by 1910, next door to where he had grown up. He didn't live in the State Street building after childhood, though a step-sister continued to live there into the 1920s with her mother. He lived with his family for several years in the former Frank Vallender home at 833 Jenifer Street, and another family-owned house at 325 West Mifflin.

The Vallender family was important in the development of Madison's early German-speaking community in their contributions to business, civic volunteerism and church. At least four generations of Vallenders and their descendants have been associated with Holy Redeemer Church. The Vallenders were a founding family of the German language congregation when it first met in the late 1850s following the Vallenders' arrival in Madison. The other German-speaking families who married into the Vallenders included members of the Casper Mayer, Esser, Heim, Schulkamp, Schweinem, Baas, and DuFreene families.

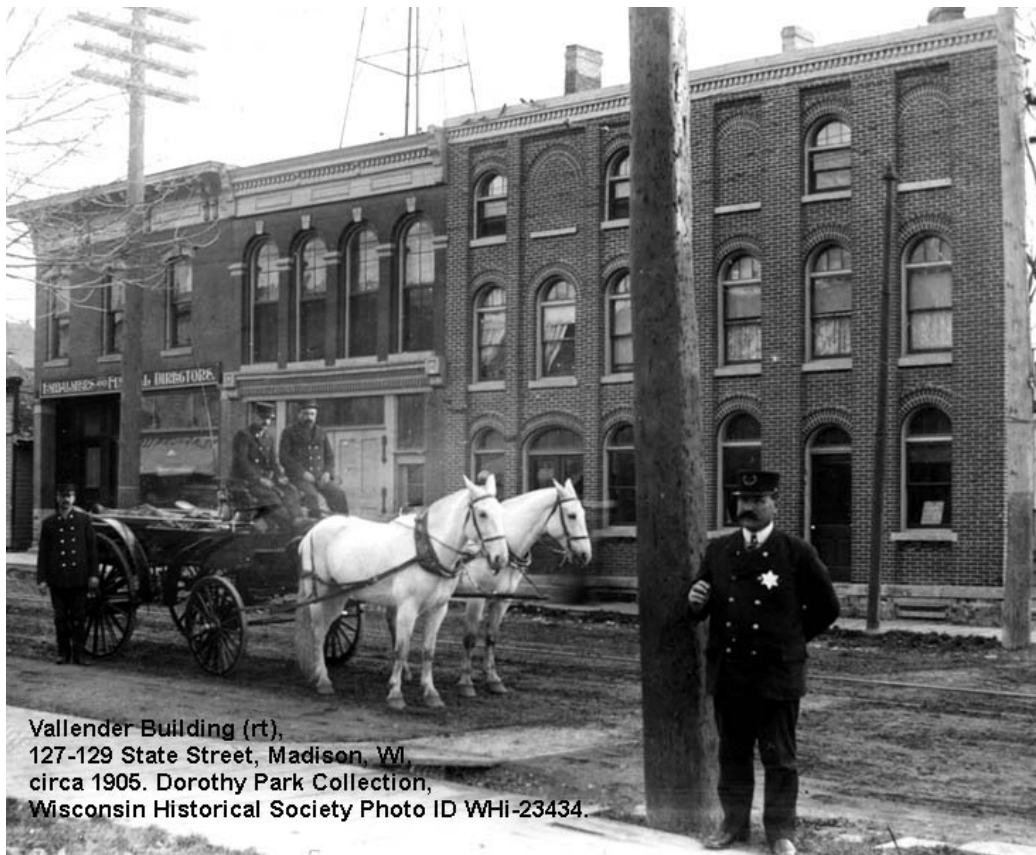
¹⁹ Wisconsin State Journal, July 15, 1945. p.8.

²⁰ History of Dane County Wisconsin. p.411.

²¹ City directories.



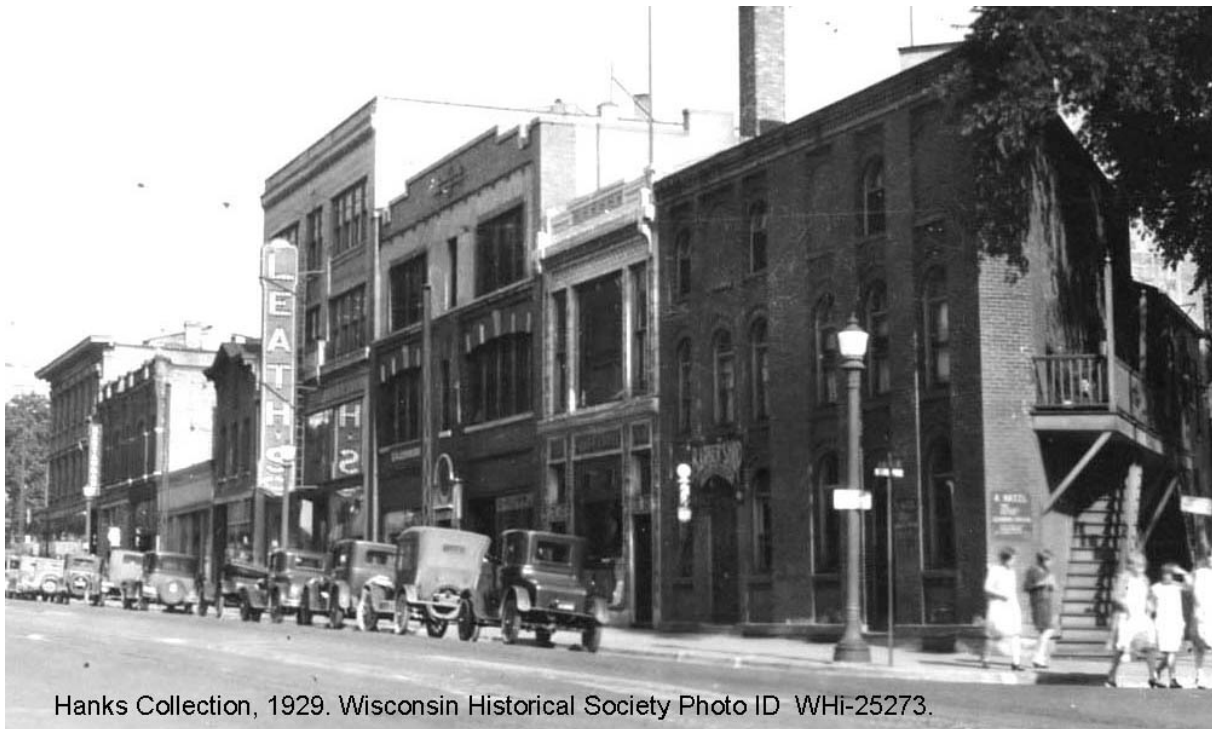
Vallender Building, 127-129 State Street, Madison, WI. Circa 1870s or later. Capital Times, March 5, 1949. Alexius Baas. Wisconsin Historical Society. No ID.



Vallender Building (rt),
127-129 State Street, Madison, WI,
circa 1905. Dorothy Park Collection,
Wisconsin Historical Society Photo ID WHI-23434.



100 block of State Street, 1915. (Left to rt) Buell Building, Fire Station No.2, and Frank Vallender Building (1867). Wisconsin Historical Society Photo ID WHI-25141.



Hanks Collection, 1929. Wisconsin Historical Society Photo ID WHI-25273.

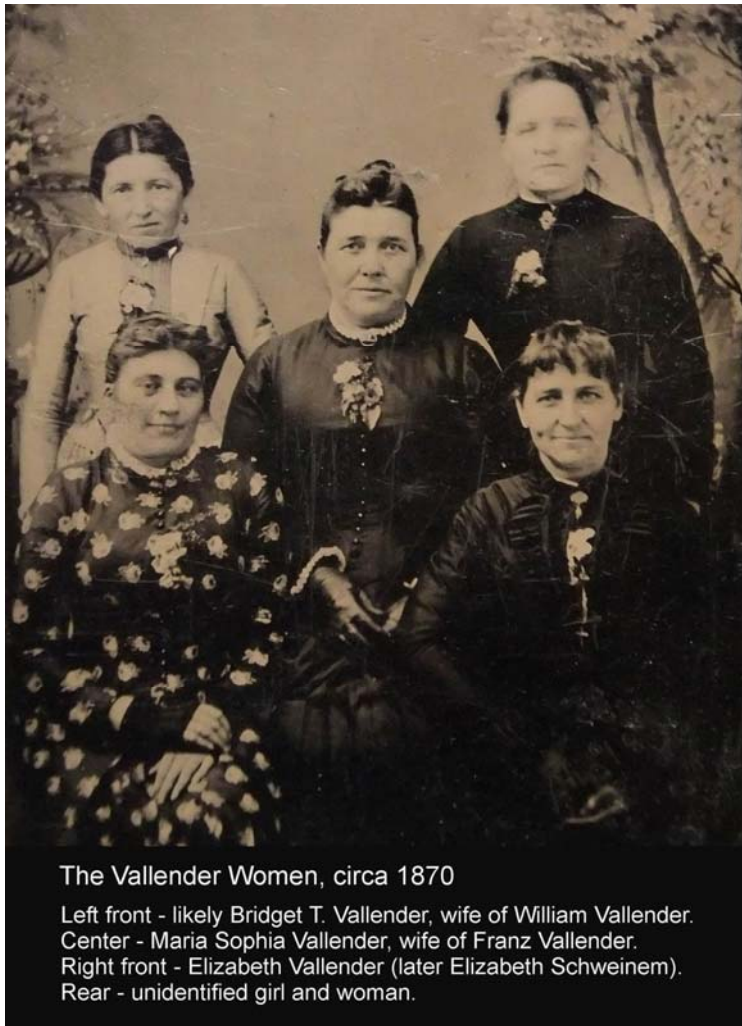


Photo courtesy of Thomas Ernser.