Mansion Hill

Glimpses of Madison's Silk Stocking District

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Anotated copies of the text are available at the Madison Public Library and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Corrections and additional information — anecdotes, diaries, letters, or old photographs that may further illustrate the history of the hill — will be most graciously appreciated by the author.

March, 1981

Cover: Annie Corbet Van Slyke, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte Van Slyke, in front of their home at 510 N. Carroll Street, in May, 1867. WHi(X3)35212.

"The beauties of Gilman Street, from Pinckney down the hill, just now, cannot be described on paper by a Faber. Only a photographer can do justice to that spot."
"Jud" Stone, *Wisconsin State Journal,* June 5, 1900.

View toward North Butler Street along an elm-lined East Gilman Street, c. 1895. The Charles Mears house is on the left and beyond it are the Governor's mansion and the B. F. Hopkins house. The front porch of the John Gurnee house, 115 E. Gilman Street, is just visible behind the Fuller-Bashford house on the right, 423 N. Pinckney Street. Photo by E. R. Curtiss. WHi(X3)30436.

This publication is dedicated to Walter E. Scott and Frank Custer, whose tireless efforts have instilled within countless area residents a genuine interest in Madison's history.

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A view of North Pinckney Street from the veranda of the Conover home, (McDonnell-Pierce house), c. 1895. WHi(X3)29647.

Introduction

The names Yankee Hill, Aristocracy Hill and Big Bug Hill reflect the former social and economic prominence of the mansion-studded ridge of land bordering the southern shore of Lake Mendota. Here were the homes of statesmen, land and timber speculators, merchants, industrialists, university professors, lawyers, judges, political leaders and society belles.

Big Bug Hill originally extended westward to include State and Langdon Streets toward the university. Bordered by James Madison Park to the north, the Capitol Square and State Street to the south, this distinctive neighborhood today fades at its western end into a mixture of modern high-rises, fraternity houses and university campus buildings.

With the resurgence of interest in the area in recent years, it became known as "Mansion Hill."

The area continues to delight the many people who daily traverse its walks and streets. Its architecture — much of it unique in design, construction and materials — its landscaping, and its setting all give Mansion Hill a sense of history and character that is unmatched in the state.

An unraveling of the thread of development that has created the Mansion Hill of today may provide a better understanding of the forces that shaped it and spur interest in its preservation.

Discovery

Wisconsin's attainment of statehood, with Madison as its capital, and the establishment of the state university in 1848 assured the young Village of Madison's future and economic stability. The ridge of land bordering the Fourth Lake, later renamed Lake Mendota, was thus guaranteed a prominence in history. Opportunity brought to the hill Yankees primarily from Ohio, Vermont, Connecticut and upstate New York. They would orchestrate the hill's development and dominate the social, economic, and political and business affairs of the emerging city and new state from their eyrie atop the Mendota Ridge well into the 20th century.

Madison historian Daniel S. Durrie recounts the influx of these adventuresome pioneering spirits:

> Occasionally, in the course of time, men of wealth and means, with steady habits and progressive ideas, would come and settle down in our midst, and thus, by littles, the character of the people for moral and intellectual stability grew and was established in the then beautiful village, so early to become the loveliest city of the northwest.

While modest frame cottages and rickety shacks were scattered near the Capitol Square, Julius T. Clark, a man of vision, saw the promise in the lands overlooking the Fourth Lake. Clark bought two entire blocks bordering the north and south sides of the first block of East Gilman Street and erected a small frame house. Years later, he recalled:

> It was the first instance in which any improvement had been made in that part of town, and almost the first on the northwest side of the Capitol park. Even after I had completed and was occupying my house, my friends would jokingly ask me how I liked my country life, and whether I had any difficulty in finding my way back and forth.

He added:

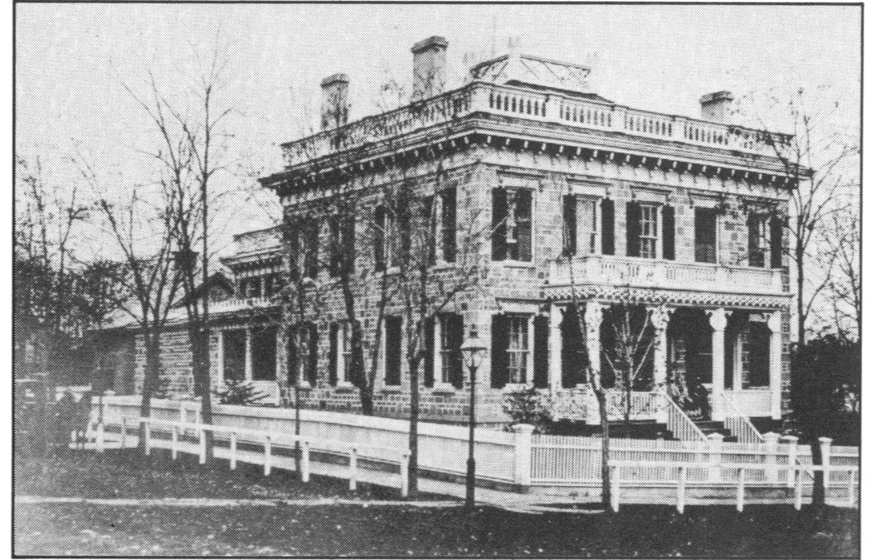
> . . . what is now the most attractive portion of the city, was then, and for some years later, almost an impassable forest, with a dense undergrowth of young trees and briars, through which I used to make my way hunting for partridges and other game, with great difficulty.

The ridge that Clark built upon was created by retreating glaciers that deposited crushed rock and sand over 12,000 years ago. The ridge's height, at the site of Clark's residence, is just over 80 feet above lake level. The ridge rises steeply both from the shore bordering its northwest side and from what was originally a marshy area on its northeast side. It slopes gradually toward State Street and the university to the southwest. From its crest the slope drops sharply at first toward the southeast, then more gradually before rising again to the hill upon which the Capitol is situated. With deep, well drained soils that provided solid construction opportunities, the ridge soon sprouted some of the most splendid buildings ever to be built in the city.

Sandstone Jewels

In 1851, with the arrival of Vermont Yankees Levi B. Vilas and Jeremiah T. Marston, the ridge boasted its first substantial dwellings. Vilas, a former judge, and Marston, a newspaper editor, were impressed during their first visit by the beautiful setting of the village nestled among the trees between the lakes. They bought properties on the ridge overlooking Fourth Lake at opposite corners of Henry and Langdon Streets. Grand stone houses, the likes of which primitive Madison had not seen, were erected in the woods, even though the streets in the vicinity had not yet been laid. Vilas and Marston both became influential in the development of the village, which in 1856 was incorporated as a city. Two years later, Vilas was a partner in constructing the city's first fine hotel, later known as the Vilas House, at the corner of East Main Street and Wisconsin Avenue. He also was a founder of the old Dane County Bank, later known as the First National Bank. Marston operated a general store and became chairman of the Dane County Board of Supervisors.

NOTE: Addresses in parentheses are those most associated with the individual or associated at the date mentioned.

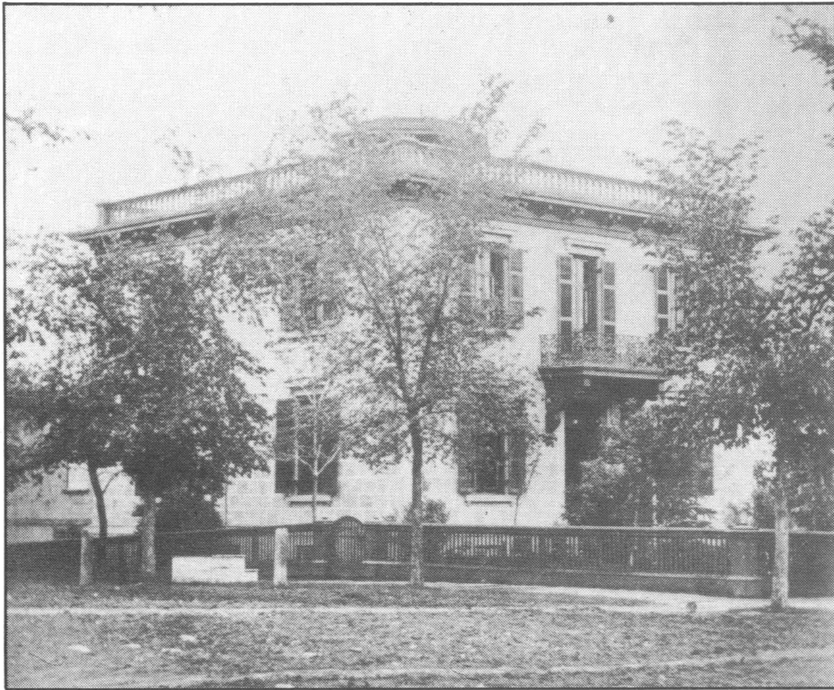


The Levi B. Vilas home, 521 N. Carroll Street, c. 1868-1878. WHi(X3)11546.

Vilas' home (521 N. Henry Street) was regarded as "the most elegant private residence in the state." Across the street, the Marston home (520 N. Henry Street) stood like a Greek temple, graced by massive white pillars rising two stories in height.

Clearly, the tone for future development of the ridge had been set. In 1853, the construction of the red brick Italianate residence for Lansing Hoyt (102 E. Gorham Street) repeated the example on the east end of the ridge.

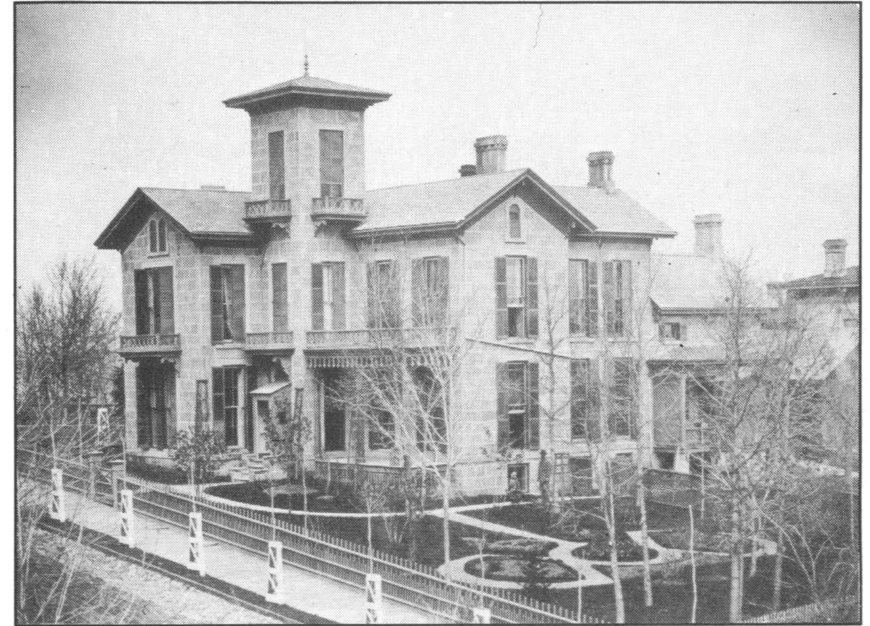
The ambition of the Yankees, reflected in the scale and pretentiousness of their dwellings, was not limited only to that section of the city. In 1846, Jairus Fairchild, Madison's first mayor, selected the site for his impressive red brick residence (1 W. Wilson Street) on the bluff above the Third Lake (Monona). Other prominent Madisonians, such as David Atwood and Simeon Mills, followed suit. The development of the Monona Avenue and Wilson Street neighborhood overlooking Lake Monona paralleled the character and style of Big Bug Hill. Meanwhile, Ex-Governor Leonard Farwell, also a Yankee, encouraged similar construction on the Third Lake Ridge along Spaight Street, much of which he owned. Other substantial stone and brick houses were also built at that time in other parts of the city, but today Mansion Hill contains the only remaining concentration of those 19th century dwellings.



The Kendall house, 102 E. Gilman Street, c. 1868. In 1868, D. R. Garrison of St. Louis, president of the Southern Pacific Railroad, bought the house. An octagonal cupola then crowned the roof — later replaced by a mansard roof. See photo, p. 25). Photo by J. F. Barks. WHi(X3)33389.

A veritable parade of new sandstone residences followed. Also in 1855, Julius T. White began construction of his Italianate mansion (130 E. Gilman Street). In 1856, banker H. K. Lawrence built his Italian villa style residence (423 N. Pinckney Street) with the help of Napoleon Bonaparte Van Slyke, another of the pioneer bankers who built or financed many of the sandstone houses on the hill. Lawrence's house was built across Gilman Street from that of J. E. Kendall's. The year 1858 saw the construction of the Alexander A. McDonnell residence (424 N. Pinckney Street) and, on the last corner of the same intersection, the cream brick Van Slyke house (28 E. Gilman Street). In 1859, Samuel Fox, a hardware merchant, built his stone house (510 N. Carroll Street), which he shortly sold to Van Slyke, who lived there until his death in 1911. In the same year, Julius Clark, who had earlier predicted that the ridge would become desirable residential property, built his own magnificent brick Italianate mansion (12 E. Gilman Street). Its grounds, which gently sloped to the shore of Lake Mendota, were "regarded as the most beautiful in the city."

The explosive growth of the Village of Madison in the mid-1850s resulted from the extension of the railroads from Chicago and the expansion of state government and commerce. The influx of cheap immigrant labor and the presence of local sandstone quarries and suitable clays for brickmaking all contributed to the proliferation of stone and brick mansions. The boom years saw the construction of lumber dealer Hiram C. Bull's red brick mansion (620 State Street) on the westernmost slope of the ridge, David Johnson's stone



The Fuller-Bashford house, 423 N. Pinckney Street, c. 1868-1870. The garden may well have been laid out by Donnel and Kutzbock, who likely were the architects for the house. Photo by J. Haynes. WHi(X3)20029.

dwelling (423 N. Carroll Street), and banker J. E. Kendall's massive sandstone residence built in the "Italian" mode on the eastern end of the ridge (104 E. Gilman Street). Soon other homes would follow. An 1855 newspaper account related the volume of construction activity and a reason for its fevered pace:

> There are now no less than 150 and perhaps 200 buildings commenced and in the various stages of completion, in this town, to-day, and yet building has barely commenced. It seems that everybody is coming to Madison, and everybody who does, must build. One stimulus to building this season is the fact that materials, etc., are much cheaper, as we are informed, than usual.

Maturation

During those early decades of the city's growth, from 1860 to 1880, the construction of industrial plants, business blocks and homes was booming. The export of the county's agricultural products increased, and business and trades blossomed in the capital city. The city's population during this period increased by over 60 percent. Ornate brick and frame dwellings were built among those of the first arrivals to the hill. The upwardly mobile manufacturers, attorneys and doctors built handsome brick Italianate houses on Langdon Street toward the university, east along the crest of the ridge on Gorham and Gilman Streets, and south along North Carroll Street toward the Square. One of those was built for banker Lucien S. Hanks (216 Langdon Street) in 1870. The intricately detailed red brick Italianate mansion and its location on the lake reflected Hanks' financial achievements and his stature in the community.

A view of the hill from the Capitol, c. 1868. The old City Hall on the left at the intersection of Mifflin Street and Wisconsin Avenue was designed by Donnel and Kutzbock. Beyond it are the Daniel K. Tenney house, at 401 N. Carroll Street, the N. B. Van Slyke house at 510 N. Carroll Street, and the W. S. Main house at 511 N. Carroll Street. At 316 Wisconsin Avenue is what was later the home of John A. Johnson and at the head of Langdon Street stands the home of Mrs. J. R. Perkins. The residence of Julius T. Clark at 12 E. Gilman Street crowns the ridge on the right. WHi(X3)960.

The hill's growth during the following decades paralleled that of the city. Between 1880 and 1902 Madison's population doubled to an estimated 20,678, largely due to the influx of German and Norwegian immigrants. The availability of cheap labor, coupled with the development of electrical generation and other technological innovation, encouraged industrial growth. The rapid expansion of the university and the businesses supported by the city's burgeoning population made for an increased number of middle class professionals, government employees and university professors. They rubbed shoulders with the hill's staid denizens and rented or built homes in the vicinity.

The construction boom and rising land values led to the gradual subdivision of the remaining spacious yards and construction of high quality residences.

The case of Magnus Swenson illustrates the point. Swenson had emigrated from Norway to the U. S. at age 14. He worked his way through the University of Wisconsin and graduated with the highest honors in metallurgical engineering. Swenson had a distinguished and varied career as a chemist, entrepreneur and prodigious inventor in sugar processing and other industries. He retired to Madison by 1899, bought the Col. John Knight residence (28 E. Gilman Street), originally built by N. B. Van Slyke, subdivided its expansive lawns and built for himself a pretentious residence at the lower edge of the bluff overlooking the lake.

A view of the eastern end of the hill from the roof of the Capitol, c. 1868. Prominent are the Gorham Street mansions of Elisha W. Keyes (far left) and Timothy Brown. To the rear, on Gilman Street (from left to right) are the homes of John Gurnee, George P. Delaplaine (later the governor's mansion) and Benjamin Franklin Hopkins. The sandstone building on the right, that housed the Wisconsin State Journal, was built in 1855 by R. S. Bacon of Cleveland, Ohio, for the Commercial College. Later, it was known as the Ogden block and the Madison Hotel. Photo by J. F. Barks. WHi(X3)2056.

During the late 19th century, the remodeling or replacement of older buildings with new, more prestigious houses kept construction booming. Sometimes older, outmoded houses were bought and moved to cheaper, less developed land and their original sites bore new dwellings. For example, real estate developer Frank G. Brown (130 E. Gorham Street), wanting to build a new residence for his family, bought the large lakeside home of former State Supreme Court Justice William P. Lyon (28 Langdon Street) in 1903. Brown sold the house to an employee of his, who moved it to its present location at 1142 E. Gorham Street. The movers cut the massive frame structure in half for the move and reassembled it at its new site. Brown then built the red brick Georgian Revival structure that is today the home of Alpha Phi sorority. Brown's residence was one of the last private homes built on Langdon Street.

Social Complexion

The social makeup of the hill's population was remarkably homogeneous. The early Yankee settlers who dominated the area developed a closely knit, but by no means exclusive, society.

Those who had arrived in those early days were generally young and caught up in the westward migration that captivated their spirits and imaginations. Often single and college educated, many had already worked for several years at trades or professions. They were attracted to Madison by the accounts that a bustling metropolis was growing out of the wilderness.

W. A. P. Morris and family at home, 635 Howard Place, in 1912. Morris is seated on the left. WHi(X3)34821.

Some newcomers to Madison could buy a suitably located lot and contract to build a house, but the majority approached Yankee Hill more gradually, first gaining the prosperity that would win them social acceptance.

Some of the early settlers on the ridge were men of modest means who in time would achieve status as "merchant princes" or as industrialists, eventually approaching that of the original "Big Bugs." On the fringes of the hill, homes were built by merchants, retailers, and manufacturers who wanted to live there for reasons of status, marriage or business relationships.

Ethnic Origins

Yankees of the hill were primarily of Anglo-Saxon origins; the rest of the population had a sprinkling of Scandinavians, Irish and Germans. Among those of Scandinavian blood who settled on the hill were: Halle Steensland (315 N. Carroll Street), consul to Norway, an insurance company executive and speculator; Rasmus B. Anderson (316 N. Carroll Street), consul to Denmark and editor of *Amerika*, one of the four largest Norwegian newspapers in the country; John A. Johnson (316 Wisconsin Avenue), agricultural implement manufacturer; and Ole Bull (130 E. Gilman Street), famed violin virtuoso. Domestics of the Yankee families were predominantly of foreign-born parentage.

Family and Business

The complex weaving of interrelationships among the residents of the hill and Madison's society made for an often tightly knit web of familial, economic, political and organizational interests. These relationships played

Rasmus B. Anderson with wife Bertha and son Rolf at home, c. 1900. WHi(X3)36961.

important roles in the growth and development of business, religious institutions, the arts, civic organizations, political movements and the University of Wisconsin. Neighborly intermingling and more formal social activities resulted in marriages, business partnerships and the organization of social groups, civic improvement societies, and recreational clubs. These relationships also affected the development of the hill in the location of homes and in the sharing among related households of the outbuildings, yards and carriage houses.

At one time, as many as 14 interrelated families lived within two blocks of one another in the Carroll and Gilman Street vicinity. A description of the intermarriage of the Mears, Hobbins, Jackson, Stevens and Suhr families will illustrate the point.

In 1871, James Mears, an uncle of N. B. Van Slyke, built the two-story brick Italianate house at the intersection of North Carroll and West Gilman Streets (420 N. Carroll Street). Mears and his brother, Charles, who built his own frame house only two blocks away at 116 E. Gilman Street, were originally from Vermont. In 1875, James Mears' daughter, Mary "Minnie" Mears, married her neighbor, Joseph W. Hobbins (114 W. Gilman Street), a banker.

Hobbins' son, William J., married Bertha Suhr, daughter of banker John J. Suhr (121 Langdon Street), whose yard abutted that of the Hobbins. Also on Carroll Street (323 N.) lived the James A. Jackson family. Joseph Hobbins' cousin, Syndonia Hobbins, had married Joseph's step-brother, James A. Jackson, in 1872. Syndonia's son, Reginald H. Jackson, married Elizabeth Stevens, a daughter of neighbor Breese Stevens (401 N. Carroll Street). As a

The Joseph W. Hobbins house at 114 W. Gilman Street, c. 1900. WHi(X3)28644.

wedding gift to the newlyweds, Stevens built a home for them next door (415 N. Carroll Street).

Family ties between the Suhrs and Hobbinses are evident in one of Madison's oldest family operated businesses. In 1871, John J. Suhr founded the German-American Bank. In 1885, he erected the handsome sandstone flat iron-shaped building at the intersection of East Main Street and King Street to house the bank. The following year Suhr built his fine Second Empire style residence at 121 Langdon Street and became a backyard neighbor of the Joseph W. Hobbins, after which the marriage between the families occurred. The bank relocated to 1 N. Pinckney Street in 1922 and is now the American Exchange Bank.

Another example of family ties that may also have been induced by convenience is that of Orsamus Cole, a Supreme Court Justice from 1855 to 1892, and his neighbor Roberta Garnhart. In 1858, Cole built the brick residence at the northwest corner of Pinckney (406) and Gorham Streets, across the street from his friend and political compatriot, "Boss" Elisha W. Keyes (102 E. Gorham Street). In 1879, Cole married Miss Garnhart, and moved into the Garnhart home (424 N. Pinckney Street).

Among other residents of the hill were leaders of the city's growing agricultural implement manufacturing and marketing businesses. Morris E. Fuller (423 N. Pinckney Street), one of the founders of the First National Bank, also founded an agricultural implement manufacturing firm that evolved to include John A. Johnson (312 Wisconsin Avenue). The company was incorporated in 1883 as Fuller & Johnson and grew to serve an international market. Its plant, located on East Washington Avenue, still stands today as a complex of offices

The John J. Suhr residence, 121 Langdon Street, in 1914. On the left is the W. H. Watson house, one of the first houses on Langdon Street, built in 1858 and replaced by the Chi Omega chapter house in 1926. On the right is the Alexander H. Main house built about 1892 for the brother of Willet S. Main. Photo by the Meuer Photoart House. WHi(M491)26.

and retail outlets. A vice-president, Samuel Higham, built his picturesque frame residence only a stone's throw from Fuller's home, at 319 N. Pinckney Street.

Neighbors down the hill from the Fullers, though a class apart, were Nels E. Frederickson and his brother-in-law, David T. Sorenson. Immigrants from Copenhagen, they operated a successful construction firm and during the Civil War built their double house at 21 E. Gorham Street. In the late 1870s, Sorenson, Frederickson & Fish, contractors and manufacturers of building materials, evolved into the Sorenson Sash, Door and Blind factory and the Frederickson & Fish Company. At that time the men went their separate ways and Sorenson built his own home nearby (129 E. Gorham Street). Frederickson's partner, William Fish, later built a home at 131 W. Gilman Street. His son, Albert Frederickson, who later inherited the business, built his Tudor style home at 18 E. Gilman Street around the turn of the century.

The Social Milieu

A celebration marking the silver wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Proudfit, c. 1899. Surrounding the Proudfits, seated at the center, were some of the hill's prominent individuals. Standing, from left tonight, are: Minnie Atwood, Mrs. Mollie Vilas Hanks, L. M. Hanks, F. M. Brown, Mrs. William Marshall, Dr. William Marshall, F. G. Brown, Mrs. Stanley Hanks, Stanley G. Hanks, Mrs. Henry Vilas, Henry Vilas, Mrs. F. C. Spensley, F. C. Spensley, Mrs. Carl Johnson, Carl Johnson, Mrs. Edsall, Mrs. F. W. Allis, Dr. Edsall, and F. W. Allis. Second row, left to right: H. B. Hobbins, Mrs. D. B. Frankenburger, Mrs. F. G. Brown, Mrs. Levi Vilas, Mrs. O. D. Brandenburg, Mrs. F. M. Brown, Mrs. S. H. Marshall, S. H. Marshall, Mrs. A. B. Morris. Seated on floor: O. D. Brandenburg, D. B. Frankenburger, Elizabeth Proudfit, A. E. Proudfit, Mrs. A. E. Proudfit, Josephine Proudfit, A. B. Morris, and F. F. Proudfit. Photo by E. A. Baugher. WHi(X3)36962.

Clubs and Associations

Toward the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century, Madison's civic-minded citizens, like others across the country, were caught up in social reform and efforts to beautify and improve their city. The residents of Big Bug Hill were no exception. Frequently they were among the founders, benefactors, and leading members of the city's numerous social and civic improvement societies, clubs and organizations. They also were instrumental in developing parklands, pleasure drives and public facilities. Among these groups were the Women's Club, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Attic Angel Association, the Madison Improvement Association and the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association.

The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association was organized in July, 1894, the outgrowth of a move to build a road connecting the university and Picnic Point — today's Willow Drive. The big-name supervisory committee that oversaw the fund-raising consisted of W. H. Rogers (1110 E. Johnson Street), N. B. Van Slyke, Frank G. Brown (130 E. Gorham Street), John H. Suhr, Judge Romanzo Bunn (104 Langdon Street), Lucien S. Hanks (216 Langdon Street) and John M. Olin (762 Langdon). The group helped to buy and improve Farwell Drive, Lake Mendota Drive, and the many parks and drives named for contributors and donors: Breese Stevens, Daniel K. Tenney, John Olbrich, F. W. Hoyt, Thomas E. Brittingham, and Professor Edward T. Owen.

Other clubs were devoted to the fine arts, literature, debate and oratory. Their memberships repesented the meeting of "town and gown" that characterized the social make-up of the hill. The Madison Literary Club was one of these, a club formed in 1877 by Dr. Joseph Hobbins, Ella Giles and Rasmus B. Anderson. Modeled after a club in Brookline, Massachusetts, the club was a "distinctively social as well as literary organization."

In 1878, another group, the Town and Gown Club, was founded to draw together "articulate" and "accomplished" men who were "appreciative of diversity, fine food, fine drinks, and fine conversation." It was founded by attorney Burr W. Jones (112 Langdon Street), attorney Charles Noble Gregory (145 W. Gilman Street), and Speech Professor David B. Frankenburger (115 W. Gilman Street). The membership in 1894 included the familiar names of Edward T. Owen, Edward A. Birge, Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles Kendall Adams, Charles R. Van Hise, and Breese Stevens, as well as Professor Joseph Jastrow (237 Langdon Street), Professor Charles R. Barnes (712 Langdon Street), and Lucius Fairchild, vice-president of the State Journal Printing Company. Fairchild was the only member who lived outside the immediate vicinity. These men were also members of the Madison Literary Club. The Town and Gown Club met in the members' homes to discuss the issues of the day.

Sarah Fairchild Conover at home, c. 1890-1895. WHi(X3)26674.

A Less Formal Nature

Some students of literature, in turn, found mentors among the hill's society. Young writers and students at the university, for example, sought out the literati who occasionally presented papers and spoke at public events, club meetings and university classes.

Arthur B. Braley (422 N. Henry Street), a Shakespearian scholar and municipal court justice, was credited with having encouraged the work of Wisconsin-bred poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Braley had become known for his essays, stories and book reviews, ranging from political analyses to discourses on Shakespeare that enjoyed wide publication through the local, state and regional newspapers. A life-long friend of Braley, Wilcox said: "It was from his well-filled library that I gained my first knowledge of books. His editorial pen gave some of my earliest local literary efforts encouragement." As guest in the Braley home, she wrote the most popular of her verses, the oft quoted opening lines of the poem *Solitude*:

> Laugh and the world laughs with you
> Weep and you weep alone.

Braley's son, Berton, was "a versifier" whose books, poems, short stories and verses were rarely the topic of literary discussions but enjoyed a popular audience. He wrote, among other things, the lyrics of *Wisconsin Forward Forever*, otherwise known as "Varsity."

Nearby, at 211 W. Gilman Street, lived Amos P. Wilder, editor of the *Wisconsin State Journal* and father of playwright, Thornton Wilder. His home was considered a "haven for students and writers." Wilder guided novelist Robert Pinkerton, Wisconsin historian Fred L. Holmes, newspaper writer Louis Bridgeman, and *Capital Times* founder and editor William T. Evjue.

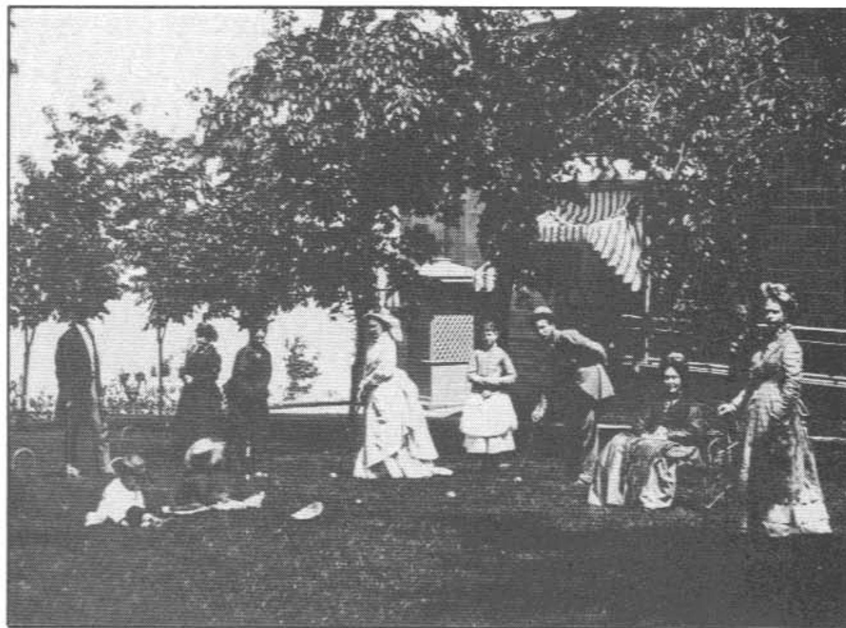
"A Handsome Reception"

The hill's reputation for lavish social gatherings was unmatched. Guest lists included leading citizens and visiting diplomats, royalty, presidents and nationally known artists, performers and writers.

One of the main stages for the flurry of social affairs was the former governor's mansion at 130 E. Gilman Street. The house was built of sandstone in the Italianate style in 1855 by Julius T. White, an insurance company vice-president. Three years later, George P. Delaplaine, a real estate speculator and investor, bought the house and entertained "a delightful society of musicians, painters, authors and people of advanced thought, and did all in his power to assist the promising youth of Madison, Milwaukee, and the surrounding towns in development of their talents," according to a later account.

In 1868, J. C. Thorp, who built his wealth on northern pineries, bought the sandstone mansion. His wife, Amelia Chapman Thorp, soon reigned over Madison's society. In remodeling the house to accommodate her ambitious social functions, she enlarged the parlors and laid the first hardwood floors in the city. She commissioned a Chicago artist to paint patterns on the ceilings and furnished the rooms with Egyptian Revival-style furniture upholstered in purple brocade.

The wedding reception following the marriage of the Thorps' daughter, Sara, to Norwegian violin virtuoso Ole Bull was described as "one of the most



Croquet at the J. C. Thorp residence, 130 E. Gilman Street, c. 1873-1878. In Madison, croquet was first played on the Thorps' lawn. Seated is Amelia Chapman Thorp, and to her right is her daughter, Sara Thorp Bull, wife of violinist Ole Bull. Photo by Andrew Dahl. WHi(D31)579.

The Executive Residence, 130 E. Gilman Street, c. 1946. WHi(X3)26479.

brilliant social gatherings ever given in this city." The orchestra was brought from Chicago, the grounds were decorated with colored lanterns, and a carpet was laid to the street. The guest list included more than 1,000 people from several countries. The supper, prepared by a Chicago caterer, was described in a newspaper account as "the most splended looking and costly spread in this city. At either end was a large frosted cake, one with the American, the other with the Norwegian coat of arms."

In 1883, Governor Jeremiah M. Rusk bought the house. When he failed to win re-election in 1885, the Gilman Street residence was offered to the state for use as a governor's mansion.

Robert M. La Follette later attempted to change the image of the official residence during his governorship, 1901-1906. His wife, Belle Case La Follette, thought the term "mansion" overly pretentious, and thereafter "executive residence" was used. She also felt that the house was the property of all of the citizens of the state and held many public receptions there.

The Gilman Street residence housed 16 governors until 1950, when the former Carl Johnson house in the suburb of Maple Bluff was acquired as a governor's residence.

Politics

Many men who lived on the hill played key roles in the political life of the city, the State and the nation. Among them were "Boss" Elisha W. Keyes, John C. Spooner, William F. Vilas, and Robert M. La Follette.

Elisha W. Keyes at his office in 1904. WHi(X18)15150.

The library of Elisa W. Keyes, c. 1895-1900. The large framed photographs on the right are of Keyes and of Matthew Carpenter, a friend and state leader in Republican politics. Also framed is a feather from "Old Abe," the pet bald eagle of Wisconsin's 8th Regiment during the Civil War. The ceiling lamp, outfitted with both gas and electric fixtures, attested to the unreliability of early electric power. WHi(X3)22004.

"Boss Keyes"

Elisha W. Keyes (102 E. Gorham Street), born in Vermont and raised on a farm near Lake Mills, rose to manage Wisconsin's Republican Party machine. He moved to Madison in 1850 and shortly thereafter entered the ill-fated struggle to build an effective Whig Party opposition to the Democrats in that year's gubernatorial election. In 1854, while working at the law firm of George B. Smith, he bought his red brick home on East Gorham Street from industrialist Lansing Hoyt.

Following the birth of the Republican Party of Wisconsin in Madison in 1854, Keyes played a prominent role in the Dane County GOP and began his climb to power within the party's ranks. In 1858, he won the office of district attorney for Dane County. In the 1860s, Keyes earned the name of "Boss," reflecting his role in managing the exchange of patronage, press and railroad passes for political favors and campaign funds. He became postmaster for the Second Congressional District in 1861. From his vantage point in Madison, the political center of the state, he organized the post offices into political fiefdoms, doling out political favors for cooperative postal employees. In 1865, 1866 and 1868 he served as mayor of Madison.

Keyes, along with friend Horace Rublee (423 Wisconsin Avenue), a newspaper editor, were key figures in the "Madison Regency," a small but powerful group of sympathizers within the Republican Party whose power was based on the federal and state patronage that flowed out of Madison.

Mansion Hill Today

Directory

Included, for the most part, are people mentioned in the text and addresses of extant buildings most associated with them. Landmarks are noted (•) as well as builders (*).

N. Carroll Street
- • 315 Halle Steensland*
- • 401 Daniel K. Tenney,* Breese Stevens
- 415 Reginald and Elizabeth Stevens Jackson
- • 420 James Mears*
- 423 David Johnson*
- • 510 Napolean Bonaparte Van Slyke*
- 511 Willet S. Main*
- • 514 William Beecroft*

N. Frances Street
- 602 Chi Psi Lodge
- 629 Frederick Jackson Turner*

E. Gilman Street
- 1 Quisling Towers
- • 28 Keenan House, Col. John Knight
- • 104 J. E. Kendall*
- 115 John Gurnee*
- 125 D. Campbell*
- • 130 Julius T. White, George Delaplaine, J. C. and Amelia Chapman Thorp, Governor's Mansion

W. Gilman Street
- 15 Frank Riley
- 21 Frederick Jackson Turner
- 114 Julius T. White,* Joseph W. Hobbins
- 151 Allan D. Conover* (remodeled)
- 211 Amos P. Wilder

E. Gorham Street
- 21 Nels E. Frederickson* and David T. Sorenson*
- • 104 Elisha W. Keyes House and Period Garden Park
- • 116 Timothy Brown*
- 130 Frank G. Brown*
- • James Madison Park, Gates of Heaven Synagogue

W. Gorham Street
- 2 Quisling Clinic
- 104 Capt. J. W. Bollenbeck*
- 114 Dr. Edward G. Bartlett*

N. Henry Street
- • 422 Arthur B. Braley,* Ella Wheeler Wilcox
- 510 William T. Fish

Howard Place
- 635 W. A. P. Morris*

E. Johnson Street
- 109 Victor Peck
- 152 B. F. Perry

W. Johnson Street
- 120 Holy Redeemer Catholic Church*

Langdon Street
- 28 Frank G. Brown,* Alpha Phi
- 104 Romanzo Bunn
- • 121 John J. Suhr*
- 131 John B. Winslow*
- 150 Halle Steensland*
- 237 Rachael and Joseph Jastrow*

N. Pinckney Street
- 215 Truman E. Bird*
- 222 J. O. Gordon
- 319 Samuel Higham*
- 406 Orsamus Cole,* George B. Burrows
- • 423 H. K. Lawrence,* Morris Fuller, Robert Bashford
- • 424 Alexander A. McDonnell,* Roberta Garnhart, Sarah Fairchild Conover, Pierce House
- 531 Charles H. Tenney*

Wisconsin Avenue
- • 315 First Church of Christ Scientist*
- 416 Dr. Edmund Hart*
- 512 John N. Jones,* Prof. James B. Overton

A main source of money and favors used in political campaigning was the Chicago and North Western Railroad. Free railroad passes and other considerations were exchanged for promises of "protection" against tax levies and restrictions on railroad land grants.

In 1869, Keyes succeeded Rublee as the chairman of the powerful Republican State Central Committee and "was able to distribute the patronage, to dictate the State Republican ticket and, in some degree, to influence the selection of Congressmen," according to a political historian.

Although Keyes was a resourceful political boss, his power in the old system of discipline and patronage was gradually diminished as other wealthy men rose to prominence in politics. An 1876 federal law forbade U. S. government office holders from taking part in political management, and Keyes was forced to resign the state GOP chairmanship. He lost his bids for congressional offices in 1879 and in 1882, and had to settle for minor local political offices thereafter. His political strength was further sapped by the growing clout of the La Follette faction of the Republican Party, which he had vigorously opposed.

Spooner

John Coit Spooner, who in 1866 began his political career as Governor Lucius Fairchild's personal secretary, became one of the most powerful conservative politicians in the nation, joining Nelson Aldrich, William B. Allison and Orville Platt as one of "the Four" who ruled the U. S. Senate "at the height of its power." As a GOP leader, he was also instrumental in dethroning Keyes and slowing the rise to power of La Follette's Progressive movement in Wisconsin.

A specialist in railroad law and a regent of the university, Spooner was chosen U. S. Senator by the Wisconsin legislature in 1885. He lost his senatorial seat in 1891 when the Democrats gained control of the Legislature during a scandal over the Republican state treasurer's dubious habit of pocketing the interest accrued from state funds. William F. Vilas, a Democrat, succeeded Spooner in Congress.

Vilas

William Freeman Vilas (12 E. Gilman Street), son of Yankee settler Levi B. Vilas, was a prominent figure in the workings of the Democratic Party in Wisconsin. A "doctrinaire Democrat," Vilas had supported Democratic presidential nominee Grover Cleveland in 1884 and was rewarded with the posts of postmaster general and later secretary of the interior. In 1887, President Cleveland was received as a guest in Vilas' home. As a Madison lawyer in the 1860s and early 1870s, Vilas earned the reputation of being the "people's lawyer." He later rose to national prominence as a Bourbon Democrat, one of a group of urban politicians interested in reforms for honesty and efficiency in a government that was still protective of the moneyed interests.

Vilas' dealings as an investor, however, were questionable. For example, he was involved in suspicious timberland dealings in the northern pine lands with neighbor and business partner Col. John Knight (28 E. Gilman Street). Although the suggestions of illicit conduct were never substantiated, the issue caused a stir.

The library of William F. Vilas, 12 E. Gilman Street, after its 1904 remodeling. Vilas' portrait is on the left. WHi(X3)2416.

As a philanthropist, William Vilas contributed heavily to the university and Grace Episcopal Church. His gift to the city was Henry Vilas Park, named in honor of his son.

La Follette

Another great statesman associated with Big Bug Hill was Robert Marion (Fighting Bob) La Follette, Sr. Firebrand of the Progressive movement in the Republican Party, La Follette lived on the hill at 130 E. Gilman Street during his years as governor from 1901 until he left in 1906 to take his seat in the U. S. Senate. During this time, he and his Progressives spearheaded a wide range of reforms including a comprehensive primary election law and a reorganized state tax structure.

They also established a tax commission, a railroad commission, a civil service commission, the Legislative Reference Library and a state board of forestry. La Follette was also influential in the passage of a stringent life insurance code, a state income tax, and a corrupt practices act. He worked to establish the state's Conservation and Industrial Commissions. In addition, he made extensive use of experts and specialists from the University of Wisconsin in drafting his legislation and filling his commissions — a practice that contributed to the philosophy that became known as the Wisconsin Idea.

La Follette and the Progressives' climb to power was accomplished in spite of the Republican party "machine" esconced on the hill, which included Keyes and Phil Spooner, the brother of John C. Spooner, U. S. Marshal F. W. Oakley (524 N. Carroll Street), and Willet S. Main (511 N. Carroll Street), brother-in-law of the Spooners.

La Follette credited much of his early inspiration for the Progressive movement to two people who lived on the hill — outspoken Democrat Edward G. Ryan and U. W. President John Bascom. Ryan, as the city attorney for Milwaukee, addressed the graduating class of the University of Wisconsin in June, 1873, and Bob La Follette, about to enter the University, was in the audience that evening.

In his speech Ryan sounded what would become a Progressive them:

> There is looming up a new and dark power, I cannot dwell upon the signs and shocking omens of its advent. The accumulation of individual wealth seems to be greater than it ever has been since the downfall of the Roman Empire. And the enterprises of the country are aggregating not for economical conquests only, but for political power . . . For the first time really in our politics, money is taking the field as an organized power . . . The question will arise, and arise in your day, though perhaps not fully in mine, which shall rule . . . wealth or man; which shall lead — money or intellect; who shall fill public stations — educated and patriotic free men, or the feudal serfs of corporate capital.

These words left a deep impression on La Follette and he used them in many campaign speeches.

Ryan was later appointed chief justice of the State Supreme Court, and moved to the former Marston home (520 N. Henry Street).

The University

Bascom and the Wisconsin Idea

Of U. W. President John Bascom, Bob La Follette said:

> His addresses to the students on Sunday afternoon, together with his work in the classroom, were among the most important influences in my early life. It was his teaching, iterated and reiterated, of the obligation of both the university and the students to the mother state that may be said to have originated the Wisconsin Idea in education.

La Follette, in concert with classmate Charles R. Van Hise, later promoted the Wisconsin Idea.

The turn-of-the-century convergence of interests that linked the progressive at the university with those at the Capitol resulted in the extensive use of the university's expert advice, services and assistance in the state's affairs. Among the state-supported service universities emerging across the nation, Wisconsin was a leader in developing its university extension, agricultural short courses, correspondence courses and experimental stations.

During the administration of University President Charles Van Hise, this linkage known as "the Wisconsin Idea" took root with the aid of Gov. La Follette. The state-university tie, which grew to be a model for the nation, was based on the tenet that "the boundaries of a campus are the boundaries of the state."

John Basom (620 State Street) had done much to build a liberal, useful university. Appointed president in 1874, he was a firm believer in women's rights, allowed co-educational instruction, defended the rights of workers to join trade unions and to strike for decent wages, and spoke for the control of monopolies and of wealth in the public interest. His political views were sometimes unpopular with the Board of Regents, particularly with Elisha W. Keyes.

A view looking west from the corner of State and Frances Streets, c. 1905. Across the yard, bounded by stone retaining walls, of the William Dudley house (not shown) is the brick mansion of French Professor Edward T. Owens, 614 State Street. Beyond it is the house built by lumber dealer Hiram C. Bull, no. 620, that was later the home of U. W. President John Bascom and History Professor Richard T. Ely. Only the building (left of center) that was home to Mechanical Engineering Professor Charles I. King, 628 State Street, remains standing — now located behind busy shops. Photo by Charles N. Brown. WHi(X3)36590.

The Flowering of the University

Over the years prominent residents of the hill fostered the growth and development of the university. They served as professors, special instructors, lecturers, regents and advisers. Others lobbied for the passage of legislation beneficial to the campus and contributed funds for scholarships, facilities and programs.

Few residents of the hill could match the record of William F. Vilas, a law professor, who later, as a U. S. Senator, secured passage of appropriations bills that provided for a new library building that today serves as the State Historical Society. As a state building commissioner, Vilas oversaw the building's planning and construction. He also served as a regent and bequeathed the majority of his estate to the university — an amount that eventually reached $30 million.

Another philanthropist, lumberman Thomas E. Brittingham, built his home at 640 N. Henry Street. He was instrumental in establishing the Neighborhood House, originally on Park Street; in persuading the city to acquire and develop the park on Monona Bay that bears his name; and in commissioning the statue of Abraham Lincoln atop Bascom Hill. He also provided the university with the property comprising Eagle Heights as well as Dunmuven, his country estate in the Highlands, which subsequently became the U. W. president's residence.

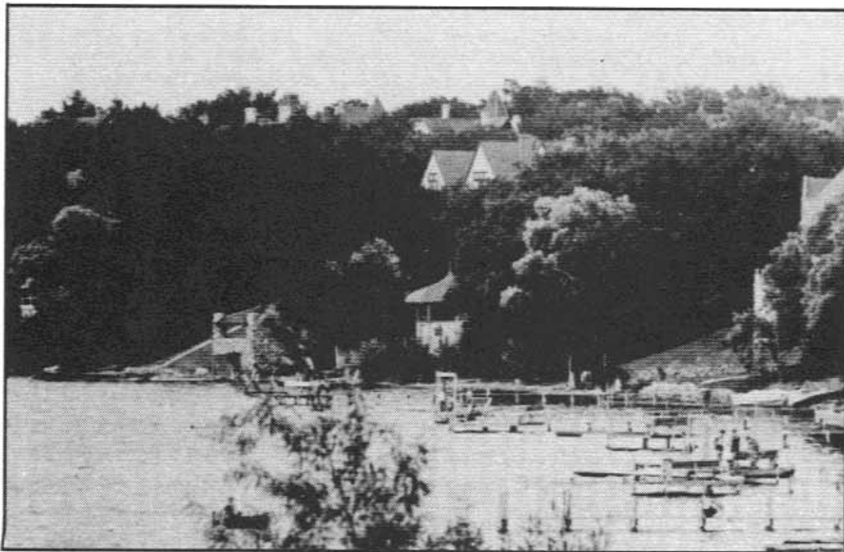
Prominent university professors who lived on the hill also played significant roles in guiding the growth of the university and later in drafting state reform legislation. One of the best known and most influential professors was Frederick Jackson Turner (21 W. Gilman Street), a professor of American history. As chairman of what was then the Historical Department, he persuaded Richard T. Ely, his former teacher and head of the Johns Hopkins University Department of Political Economy, to move to Madison in 1892. That year, the new Department of Economics, Political Science, and History was established under the direction of Ely. The work of the department's scholars came to be known as the "Wisconsin school" of history.

During 1893, Turner's pioneering work on the history of the development of the West brought him into the national limelight. Also in 1893, he built his home at 629 N. Frances Street, across the street from that of University President Charles Kendall Adams (620 N. Frances Street).

That summer, Richard T. Ely (620 State Street) became the defendant in perhaps the most famous mock trial in academic history. He was charged with the teaching of "utopian, impractical and pernicious doctrines."

A trial was held by a committee of university regents in the auditorium of the Law Building. Ely was defended ably by attorney Burr W. Jones (112 Langdon Street) who countered all of the charges successfully. The regents' report on the affair included the phrases that have become a benchmark of American academic freedom:

> Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.



The hill as seen from the university president's house at 772 Langdon Street, c. 1920. The turrets of Langdon Street mansions pierce the treetops while the boathouses of Thomas E. Brittingham (left center; extant) and of Lucien S. Hanks (right center) appear almost as sentinel posts on the shore of Lake Mendota. Photo by the McKillop Art Company. WHi(X3)36960.

Van Hise

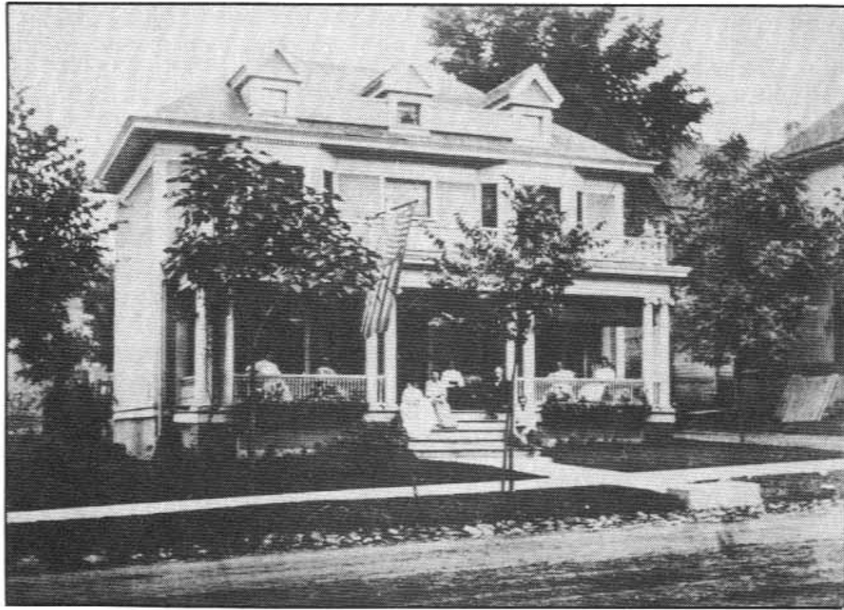
The selection of Charles Van Hise (630 N. Frances Street) as university president was due in no small part to the efforts of his neighbor, Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner enlisted the assistance of other neighbors, Moses S. Slaughter (625 N. Frances Street) and Mathematics Professor Charles S. Slichter (636 N. Frances Street), in the campaign to get Van Hise, a talented geology professor, named president. The "Frances Street Cabal" won the support of the Progressives, the press and the regents, and Van Hise was elected in 1903.

Under the administration of Van Hise, and those of Progressive governors La Follette, James O. Davidson and Francis E. McGovern, service in state government by university officials was encouraged. The govenors constantly sought the advise and service of university professors in drafting legislation and in filling positions on the newly created commissions. In 1909 alone, 41 professors were serving in 66 state positions.

Improvements Befitting the Taste

The Kendall house, 104 E. Gilman Street, in 1931. WHi(D487)12090.

The achievements, affluence and taste of Big Bug Hill's residents were reflected in their homes and neighborhood surroundings. Residences most often exhibitng the highest degree of architectural expression and grandeur were constructed near the crest of the ridge. As the hill subsided, so too did the splendor and size of dwellings.



A 4th of July at the Victor Peck home, 109 E. Johnson Street, c. 1905-1910. Peck was the proprietor of the West Madison hotel. The house, built in the 1860s, was given a facelift soon after the turn of the century and took on a contemporary appearance. WHi(X3)36958.

Despite differences in architectural styles, homes on the hill relate harmoniously to each other in scale, materials and mass. Over the years, some residents modernized their homes, usually tying together the new and the old with sensitivity.

Timothy Brown was one of them. Brown, a founder of the First National Bank and a major stockholder in the Madison Gas Company, in 1864-1865, built the Italianate, cream-colored brick house at 116 E. Gorham Street; it had the first successful central heating system and one of the first indoor bathrooms in the city. Brown's almost unheard of indoor plumbing was made possible by the construction of a private sewer with neighbors Morris E. Fuller (423 N. Pinckney Street), John Gurnee (115 E. Gilman Street), and Elisha W. Keyes. Later additions to the Brown house were the two-story bays found on the west side of the building, patterned after those embellishing the Lucien S. Hanks home (216 Langdon Street).

Other examples of similar modernization include that of the home of timberland speculator George B. Burrows (406 N. Pinckney Street). In 1894, Burrows rebuilt the porches and roof of his simple brick house, originally built by Orsamus Cole in 1858. He also added the two-story projecting octagonal tower, featuring leaded glass windows and ornately carved limestone columns and quoins. It was topped by a belvedere with a turned spindle rail.

At the turn of the century, Professor James B. Overton modernized his Italianate house at 512 Wisconsin Avenue — virtually doubling its size. The brick residence was built by John N. Jones, a hardware merchant and former U. S. postmaster, and had previously seen the addition of a mansard roof in the 1870s.

The Cole-Burrows house, 406 N. Pinckney Street, in 1878, then owned by George B. Burrows. WHi(X3)30209.

Architectural Features

The design of 19th century dwellings served functions that sometimes may not be immediately apparent. Live-in housekeepers necessitated finished attics and basements. Sidewings and basements usually housed the kitchen to provide a place for the hearth while controlling heat and odors.

The "air conditioning" system of mid-19th century mansions was provided by a central stairwell and cupola. In the summer, open windows would carry aloft the warm air of the house. The windows of turrets and attics in later buildings served the same function. Louvered blinds mounted on door and window frames screened sunlight and provided privacy.

Verandas and porches were important features of 19th century residences. They blocked the summer sun from the interior rooms while creating outdoor summer rooms. They served a social function, too, for business deals and courting. Larger, more spacious porches were built well into the 1920s.

Another fixture of Big Bug Hill was the carriage house. Among those that have withstood the changing times are the one that served the Frank G. Brown residence (130 E. Gorham Street), presently a duplex (136 E. Gorham Street); the brick structure with the arched stone lintel between the homes of Frank G. Brown and his father, Timothy Brown (116 E. Gorham Street); and the frame carriage house on West Gorham Street that served the Breese Stevens family (401 N. Carroll Street). The last one features a hand-cranked turntable, which eliminated the need to back in the horses and carriage. Many more carriage houses that originally stood on the hill were torn down or moved when the advent of telephones in the 1890s allowed residents to call commercial liveries.

Indigenous Building Materials

The construction of early Madison buildings made use of available native materials: wood, brick and stone. The wood frame houses, built with timber from the maple woodlands and oak openings nearby, were constructed in the balloon frame method, which had originated in Chicago. This method, using smaller, lighter weight structural members rather than pegged and mortised timbers, permitted facility in handling materials, resulting in rapid construction.

Mud dug from the banks of Lake Monona and fired, perhaps as early as 1837, produced a pinkish-red brick used in construction. The Elisha W. Keyes house and the Dr. Edmund G. Bartlett house (114 W. Gorham Street) were constructed of that material. Madison red brick was used through the 1870s, when harder, more durable cream-colored brick from Milwaukee and Watertown became more desirable.

The warm-hued buff sandstone was quarried from several local sources and used to build many homes and other buildings throughout the city such as the Holy Redeemer Church (120 W. Johnson Street), built in 1867. Madison's first quarry was in the vicinity of today's Madison General Hospital, but the stone for the Big Bug Hill residences most likely came from the Shorewood quarry and the nearby Stephens quarry. Constructing these buildings involved hauling rough-cut stone to the construction site where it was finished and faced or dressed.

The Architects:

Many Big Bug Hill architects designed residences along the lines of the nationally popular architectural styles portrayed in builders' pattern books, though designers contributed their own distinctively articulated details. Among the better known architects and architectural firms that left an imprint on the hill were:

Donnel and Kutzbock

The work of the partnership of Samuel Hunter Donnel and German-born August Kutzbock is seen in several sandstone mansions on the hill. Some of their work bore the stamp of a Romanesque Revival then popular in Germany — the *Rundbogenstil* or "round arch" style.

Among the firm's accomplishments were: the second State Capitol, built 1857-1863 (burned in 1904); the old City Hall, built in 1856-1857 (demolished in 1954); and the Gates of Heaven Synagogue, built in 1863 (moved to James Madison Park in 1971). Donnel and Kutzbock are credited with the design of several stone or brick residences on the hill, including the J. E. Kendall house (104 E. Gilman Street), built in 1855; the Fuller-Bashford house (423 N. Pinckney Street), built in 1856-1857; the McDonnell-Pierce house (424 N. Pinckney Street), built in 1858; the Keenan house (28 E. Gilman Street), built for N. B. Van Slyke in 1858; and the B. F. Hopkins house (142 E. Gilman Street), built in 1863 (demolished). In addition, similar design elements in the Van Slyke house (510 N. Carroll Street), built in 1859, and in the Dudley house (604 State Street), built in 1860 and demolished in 1963, suggest Donnel and Kutzbock's involvement.

The McDonnell-Pierce house, the architectural gem of the hill, best displays the Romanesque Revival features found in Donnel and Kutzbock-designed buildings. Contractor Alexander A. McDonnell used the same Prairie du Chien sandstone in the house that he employed in constructing the second Capitol building. The Pierce house interior features a centrally located oval spiral staircase that rises from the basement to the cupola. Colored Venetian glass over the hand-carved front door tints the light entering the foyer. Mahogany trim, richly ornate crown mouldings of plaster, statuary niches and intricately carved marble fireplace mantels highlight the interior.

The McDonnell-Pierce house, 424 N. Pinckney Street, in 1895, then owned by Sarah Fairchild Conover. Photo by Frederick K. Conover. WHi(C73)23.

Nader, Conover, Porter, Gordon and Paunack

The 1880s brought a flurry of construction to Big Bug Hill and gave prominence to several architects: John Nader; Allan D. Conover, who lived at 151 W. Gilman Street; Porter's partner, Lew Porter; J. O. Gordon, whose home was at 222 N. Pinckney Street, and his partner, F. W. Paunack. They designed many dwellings on the hill, in the picturesque and eclectic styles. Nader, for example, can be credited with the brick and mansard-roofed French Second Empire style residence for John J. Suhr at 121 Langdon Street, built in 1886. Conover, a professor of civil engineering and an employer of Frank Lloyd Wright while Wright was a student at the university, joined Porter in 1887. After their partnership was dissolved in 1898, Porter designed a number of the shingled and clapboard sheathed residences such as those at 407 and at 409-411 Wisconsin Avenue. Gordon and Paunack's turreted residences include the Queen Anne-styled houses built for Halle Steensland at 250 Langdon Street (1892) and at 315 N. Carroll Street (1897). These incorporated architectural elements of many styles.

Halle Steensland's library, 315 N. Carroll Street, c. 1911. The home is now the Bethel Parish Shoppe. WHi(X3)31984.

Claude and Starck

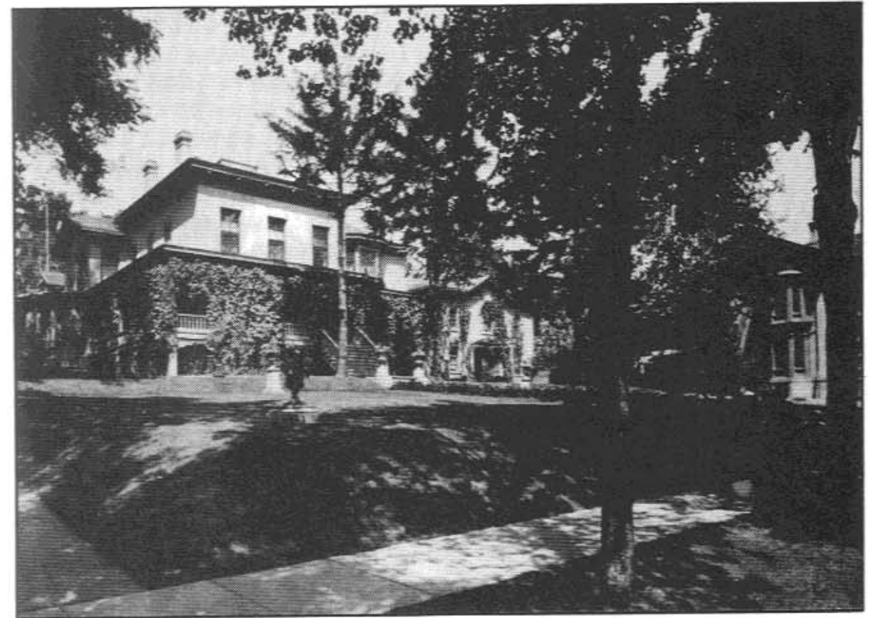
After the turn of the century, the work of partners Louis W. Claude and Edwin F. Starck became popular. Before he worked under the pioneering Louis Sullivan in Chicago, Claude had worked for Allan D. Conover. Influenced by Sullivan and his Prairie School coterie, Claude returned to Madison and joined in partnership with Starck, a skilled draftsman. In 1896, their first year together, they designed the handsome, late Queen Anne-styled residence at 416 Wisconsin Avenue for Dr. Edmund Hart; it featured Gothic tracery and stucco and half-timbered walls.

Claude and Starck later developed the Prairie School expressions for which they are best known. Built in 1911, the William Beecroft house (514 N. Carroll Street), like much of their Prairie School work, features the characteristic horizontal bands of windows and raked mortar joints, broad roofs overhanging the walls, and earthy colors of brick, mortar, stucco and wood.

Riley and Kronenberg

Among the practitioners of more traditional styles was Frank Riley, who was raised at 15 W. Gilman Street. Riley, best known for his superb renditions of Georgian and Colonial Revival styles, also designed homes with European and Mediterranean characteristics, such as those found in the Charles H. Tenney house at 531 N. Pinckney Street.

Ferdinand Kronenberg, who was trained in the office of A. O. Gordon, was best known for his public buildings and hotels, but also designed bungalows and Colonial Revival homes, including the colonial-styled house built for Capt. J. W. Bollenbeck at 104 W. Gorham Street.



The Elisha W. Keyes home and grounds at the corner of Pinckney and Gorham Streets in 1909. WHi(X3)28819.

Handsome Grounds

A variety of trees, flowering shrubs, symmetrical flower beds and extensive lawns surrounded many Big Bug Hill residences in the late 19th century. Oaks, walnuts, butternuts and hickories originally found nearby were often transplanted to commemorate special occasions. Along the streets were planted fast-growing bottomland species such as poplar, silver maple and elm. Poplars planted in the 1850's were short-lived and later replaced by elms.

Honeysuckle, mock oranges and bridal wreaths were used as foundation plantings near the homes, often placed at corners, or framing doorways, porches and windows. Shrubs also defined the intersection of walks, drives and property boundaries. A favorite feature of the late Victorian "garden of prosperity" was a clump of tall grasses, such as pampas, symmetrically grouped with large-leafed and large-petaled flowering plants.

Fencing, urns, trellises and other such features enhanced the grounds of Big Bug Hill. Ornate fences designed to keep stray animals out of yards were often made of wood, although there were a few iron mesh fences atop retaining walls of dressed sandstone. Garden furniture was rustic, usually constructed of branch segments fastened with nails. Trellises covered with grapes and flowering vines provided shade, color and fragrance. Only one reflecting pond is known to have existed — a feature of the side yard of the Timothy Brown house (116 E. Gorham Street).

The need for convenient public access to the lake resulted in the construction of a municipal boathouse (now demolished) at the foot of North Carroll Street in 1893. The twin-towered stucco and shingle-covered structure was designed by a young and little known architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, who had won a competition sponsored by the Madison Improvement Association.

A New Era

Toward the end of the 19th century, the social and physical development of the district was at its peak. At the same time, the seeds were sown for the area's decline as a cohesive and homogeneous community. The district was eventually rendered less desirable than suburban locations by the personal and business investments and policy decisions of hill residents themselves. Factors that led to the gradual out-migration to more attractive suburban areas included: increasing urbanization resulting from the expanding university; a rising interest in "healthful," sparsely settled suburbs away from the congestion of the city; and improved access to those areas via streetcar and automobile.

Secret Societies

The growth of university programs under Presidents Charles Kendall Adams and Charles R. Van Hise brought an avalanche of new freshmen, who crowded into the homes of professors and private families and joined the "lodges" of secret societies. Fraternities and sororities soon became a significant factor in the changing profile of Big Bug Hill.

The first lodge to establish residency was Chi Psi in 1883-4, located at 602 Frances Street, the corner of Langdon Street. By 1892-3, four of a total of 11 fraternities and sororities were scattered along four blocks of lower Langdon; the others were nearby on Lake, State and Frances Streets. Many were active but a year or two, and rented their houses. But in 1894, the construction of the Sigma Chi chapter house at 19 Mendota Court signalled a new age.

The first fraternity house on the hill, built in 1883, for the Chi Psi fraternity. c. 1883-1889. WHi(X3)35255.

The first ventures of the Greek societies into the heart of the Yankee domain began with the Delta Gamma sorority in 1896-7. It leased a flat in the James and Professor Alexander Kerr residence at 140 Langdon Street. That year the Sigma Chi chapter leased the residence between the homes of C. A. Chapman (202 Langdon Street) and Lucien S. Hanks (216 Langdon Street).

Meanwhile, other prominent Madisonians were building homes on the hill. Among them were Professor Frederick Jackson Turner (629 N. Frances Street), Charles N. Brown (271 Langdon Street), an administrator at the State Historical Society, Supreme Court Justice John B. Winslow (131 Langdon Street) and attorney John C. Spooner (150 Langdon Street).

Chapter houses soon occupied many of the newer buildings constructed in the once extensive yards of the Yankees. A virtual enclave of lodges was established in the West Gilman and North Henry Streets vicinity by the turn of the century. Though the influential Yankees were able to thwart a rapid transformation on upper Langdon Street, it eventually earned the name of "Greek Row" and later, "Fraternity Row."

The home of W. A. P. Morris, 635 Howard Place, in 1903. In 1900, Morris had built the brick street and several "strictly modern cottages for the accommodation and enjoyment of tenants of moderate means but discriminating taste." ***Wisconsin State Journal*****, June 6, 1900. WHi(X3)36963.**

Bountiful Lawns and Fresh Air

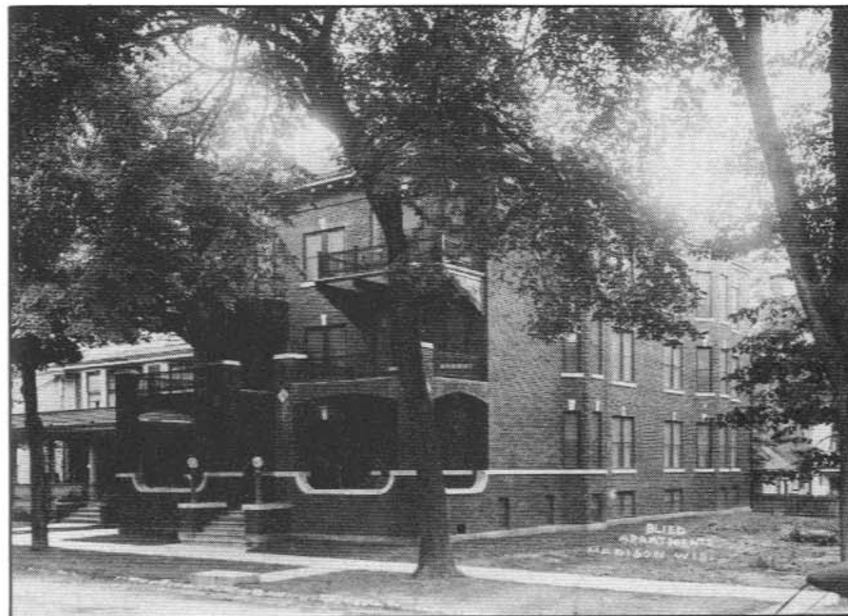
The lure of the suburbs played a major role in the transformation of Big Bug Hill. The suburbs of Maple Bluff and University Heights, which lured the second generation of the hill's families, were developed by Big Bug Hill investors. For example, Halle Steensland, founder and president of the Hekla Fire

Insurance Co. and the Savings Loan & Trust Co., was the primary developer of Maple Bluff as a summer home community for the wealthy. Among the early buyers of lots were his friends and associates. Cottages built at first only for summer use were often enlarged for year-round occupancy.

In 1892, the first electric cars of the Madison Street Railway Company rolled over new tracks to Camp Randall. Soon, the hill that rose behind the old site of the Civil War camp was to become Madison's newest suburb — University Heights — only a short walk from the end of the line. The tract of land overlooking University Bay was advertised as being only ten minutes from the Capitol Square. Among the developers of the new suburb were these Big Bug Hill residents: William T. Fish (510 N. Henry Street); attorney Burr W. Jones (260 Langdon Street); John W. Hudson (221 N. Pinckney Street), president of the Northwestern Mutual Relief Assoc.; Albert H. Hollister (17 Langdon Street), pharmacy owner; and attorney Breese Stevens (401 N. Carroll Street).

Maple Bluff and University Heights attracted people rising in stature and affluence, and others who were retiring from a lifetime of hard work and seeking a change of scenery. Some families continued to stay on Big Bug Hill, and new ones moved in, but as the Yankees and their peers died, the prominence of the hill waned.

N. B. Van Slyke at home in 1899. Photo by E. A. Baugher. WHi(X3)36264.



The two-year-old Blied Apartments, 141 W. Gilman Street, in 1914. Photo by the Meuer Photoart House. WHi(M491)24.

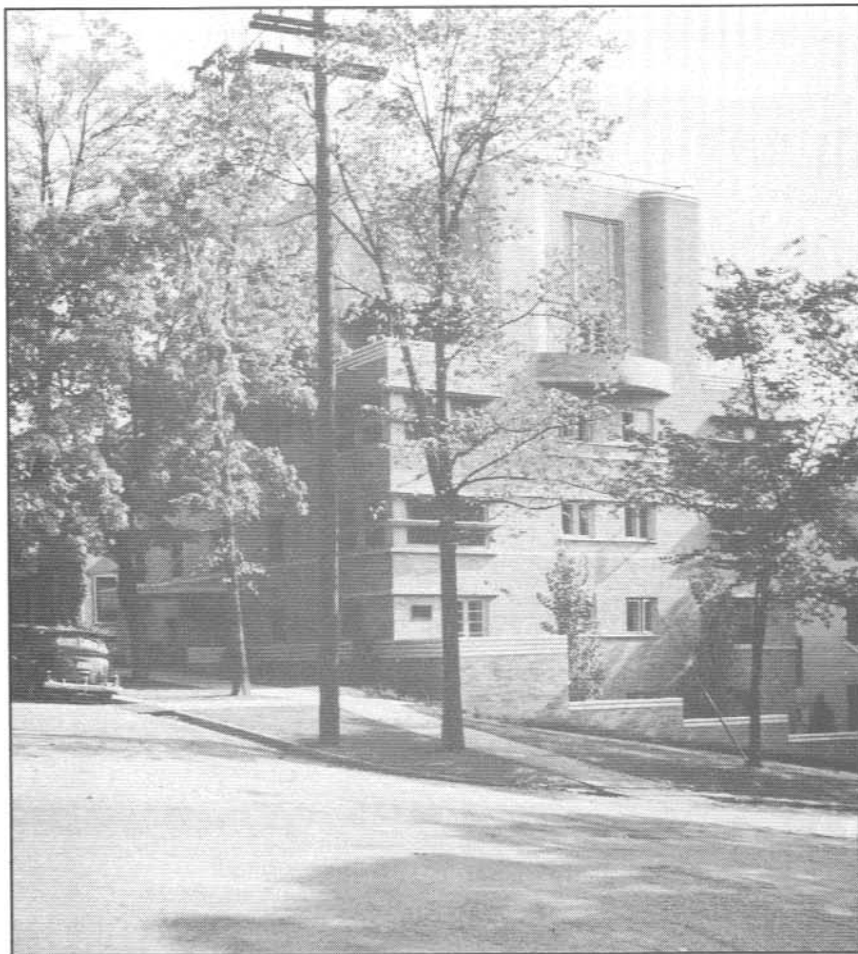
Land and Location

The changing social climate of Big Bug Hill was accompanied by shifts in its land use, density and appearance. The changes paralleled the growth of housing, commerce and government in the central city. For example, many three-flat apartment buildings were constructed on the hill from about 1910 onward — a sharp contrast to the single-family character of the area.

In 1931, the city enacted a zoning ordinance that permitted higher densities over most of the hill, paving the way for the construction of five-story buildings such as the *moderne* Quisling Towers apartment building (1 E. Gilman Street), built in 1938.

In 1942, a federal emergency housing program significantly increased the density of housing downtown. Madison was declared a "defense rental area" due to the expected influx of an additional 10,000 people who were employed at the Badger Ordnance munitions factory near Baraboo.

The federal program provided home improvement loans and construction materials to those who could "convert" or "double up" their homes and apartment buildings. The goal was 400 to 500 converted units. One of those hill residences that was "doubled" from four to eight units was the frame building at 8-10 W. Gilman Street, originally built as a duplex apartment house in 1887.



The Quisling Towers apartments, c. 1938-1940. The *moderne* style of the building, designed by architect Lawrence Monberg, is repeated in the Quisling Clinic and the old wing of the Edgewater Hotel, also by Monberg. Photo by Harold Hone. WHi(W821)48.

An Emerging Sense of History

Following the recovery from World War I, many 19th century buildings in Madison and other cities fell to the wrecking ball. Older buildings often required extensive repairs, particularly after having suffered maintenance cutbacks through the Depression and war. Also, the "progress" ethic promoted modernization at all costs. This contributed to the loss of some of the most important buildings on the hill, including the Flora Mears residence at 116 E. Gilman Street, a Queen Anne style frame building. Razed in 1959, it was replaced by the seven-story Haase Tower apartment building, which was flanked by parking lots and hailed as "the last word in modern beauty of construction."

In 1963, the ornate Vilas mansion at 12 E. Gilman Street became another casualty of "progress." National Guardian Life Insurance Company, located nearby, razed the house to construct a modern glass and steel office building. Also in the '60s, other fine residences, such as the red brick Italianate Lucien S. Hanks home (216 Langdon Street), were demolished and replaced by modern buildings.

Elsewhere in the city, Mapleside, a sandstone Greek Revival farmhouse at 3335 University Avenue, was demolished to make way for a Burger King hamburger stand. The resulting furor fueled a preservation movement that led to the creation of the Madison Landmarks Commission, an official city agency with the authority to designate landmarks and historic districts. These designations offer protection from demolition and require commission review of exterior remodeling and new construction.

Other local successes aided the preservation movement. In 1971, the endangered sandstone and brick Gates of Heaven synagogue was moved from the site of the United Bank building on West Washington Avenue to the corner of North Butler and East Gorham Streets, in the newly expanded James Madison Park; the building has since been refurbished by the city for community use.

In 1972, neighborhood activists and community leaders set up a private, non-profit corporation to buy a parcel of land at the corner of North Pinckney and East Gorham Streets. A boxy apartment building had been proposed for the site, once the front yard of Elisha W. Keyes. The resulting "vest pocket" park was landscaped in a manner compatible with its historic surroundings.

In 1977, "Big Bug Hill" became the Mansion Hill Historic District, with protection against incompatible construction and renovation. Since the establishment of the historic district, many buildings have shown gradual improvement, owner occupancy has risen, and neighborhood residents have worked hard to enhance the historic character of the area. One project credited to neighborhood volunteers was the rebuilding of a stone pathway from the street end to the lakeshore at the foot of North Pinckney Street.

Building on the Past

"Big Bug Hill" or Mansion Hill is among Madison's most valuable historical, cultural, and architectural resources. Its residents have made significant contributions in the historical development of the city, the state and the nation in business, government, research and education. The hill's unique blend of architecture displays local traditions in design and construction and reflects the growth of the city itself.

The preservation of Mansion Hill will require a continued commitment by residents and community leaders alike, and a recognition by the city as a whole that there is a future in the past.

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The William F. Vilas residence, 12 E. Gilman Street, c. 1939. Photo by Harold Hone. WHi(W821)79.