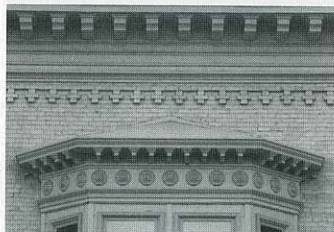


The Heart Of The City

The historic buildings and spaces of Janesville's central business district are still expressive of the city's origins as a river city in southern Wisconsin, one oriented toward manufacturing, transportation and trade. Today, four historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places contain over one hundred buildings representative of a diverse economic, social, and architectural history. Many of Janesville's downtown buildings can be "read" to reveal a variety of information about past uses, past builders, and architectural styles. However, it is often necessary to look up – well above the buildings' first stories – to find the information. Orna­te brick parapets are inscribed with the names of Yankee as well as German and other immigrant businessowners; old advertising signs announce previous enterprises, and the decorative details at the windows and roofline are indicators of the buildings' dates of construction.

Above:

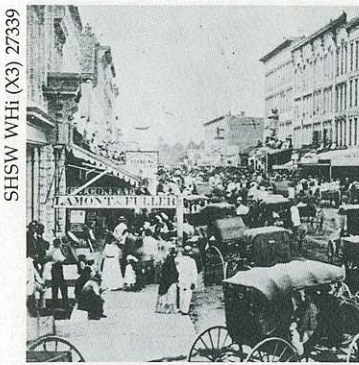
A portion of the central business district as shown on a bird's eye view of Janesville, Wisconsin: Looking Down the River in 1877."



A Brief History: 1836–1989

The Rock River rises in Fond du Lac County and runs through Lake Koshkonong on its route to the south. With its tributaries, it drains an area of approximately 3,635 square miles. Between 1835 and 1837, during the height of early land speculation in the Territory of Wisconsin, three separate towns were laid out along the banks of the Rock River in southern Rock County. The Rock was noted by early investors for its waterpower potential, and it also figured in other schemes, such as one proposal to ship lead ore from the Mineral Point area to the Mississippi.

THE HEART OF THE CITY



An early view of North Main Street on the occasion of a circus or county fair, ca. 1868-1871. The photograph was taken from the northeast corner of Court Street.

Henry Janes' townsite, platted in 1837 on the east bank of the river, was the only of the three to survive. In 1839 the county seat was established here by the Territorial Legislature, and its future importance was thus secured. In addition to the potential of waterpower to be supplied by the river, future economic growth was promised by a road from Racine to the lead-mining area of the southwestern part of the Territory.

In 1839, Thomas Lappin and a Mr. Ward of Milwaukee erected the first general store. The frame building was located near Henry Janes' cabin at the intersection of Main and Milwaukee Streets. In 1842 a toll bridge (at Milwaukee Street) replaced an early river ferry and encouraged the westward expansion of the city, particularly in its residential sections. The first store on the west side was constructed on Milwaukee Street in 1844. Typically, the earliest commercial buildings were of wood frame construction. The manufacture of brick was well underway by the mid-1840s, and in 1844, Daniel Richardson put up a three-story brick block on S. Main Street.

HIRAM JACKMAN,
PROPRIETOR OF
BIG MILL,
Manufacturer of
"JACKMAN'S BEST" FLOUR,
CUSTOM WORK DONE IN THE BEST MANNER AND
ON SHORT NOTICE.
4 & 6 W. Milwaukee St.,
JANESVILLE, WIS.

Janesville's earliest commercial and industrial enterprises were typical of river settlements in this area of fertile farmland. The construction of a dam and raceway in 1844-5 provided the nucleus for a waterpower district. The so-called "Big Mill" was finished in 1847, and it attracted grain producers from a wide area to Janesville.

Although a steamer from St. Louis reached Janesville in 1844, river transportation was not of great importance to the future of the settlement. The establishment of a tri-weekly stage between Janesville and Milwaukee in 1846, the connection of a telegraph line in 1848, and the initiation of daily mail service between Milwaukee and Janesville in 1849 were of more significance to long-term economic growth.

The city's mercantile interests reflected this industrial strength. In the 1850s, a variety of retail buildings were constructed, including large business blocks that housed banks and professional offices, and small shops that contained a great variety of enterprises, including grocers, dry goods and furniture stores, jewelers, druggists, and meat markets.

From the beginning, West Milwaukee Street on the west side of the river, and East Milwaukee and North and South Main Streets on the east side, formed the main commercial and retail spine of the city. The buildings on the east side, near the county courthouse, tended to house banking and professional offices as well as merchants, while the west side provided a mixture of shops and services. A variety of industrial firms were located on both sides of the river but were concentrated near the raceway and dam.



The Smith Block, northeast corner of N. Main and E. Milwaukee Streets. Constructed c. 1866; demolished 1966. Photograph 1888.

SHSW WHI (X3) 27339

RCHS

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Two rail lines, the first completed in 1856, linked the city to Chicago, Milwaukee, Green Bay and the West. By the beginning of the Civil War, hotels, banks, packing houses, flour and textile mills, and several agricultural implement dealers were among the enterprises that symbolized Janesville's location on the river and on rail and overland routes.

The city's population grew from only 412 in 1842 to 3,100 in 1850, and reached 7,018 in 1855. In 1870, it numbered 8,000 and was outranked in size by only five other cities in Wisconsin: Milwaukee, Fond du Lac, Oshkosh, Racine, and Madison. Most of Janesville's early residents, like those who would settle here during the rest of the nineteenth century, were native-born, with many coming from New York and New England. Lappin, Jackman, and Richardson are names associated with still-extant buildings that represent this influential Yankee group. Irish, English, Scotch, Norwegians and Canadians were also represented in some number in the early population, but by 1880 the Germans were a significant foreign-born group in the city. Buchholz and Yahn are among the names of German businessmen whose buildings are still standing on East and West Milwaukee Streets.

Flour milling was a basis of the local economy in the 1850s and 1860s, but agricultural machinery production, woolen and cotton manufacture, fruit and vegetable processing and tobacco warehousing overshadowed it in importance during the 1870s and 1880s. In addition, transportation-related industries, including carriage, harness, and saddlery manufacture were also well-established by 1870.

The 1880s and 1890s were characterized by less dramatic economic growth than in the previous decades, but new retail and commercial buildings were erected downtown, and many were remodeled. During this period, Janesville was also the head of the draft horse importing industry, and attracted horse buyers from a wide area. Although the horse farms were located outside the city, horse "showrooms" were built in several downtown locations.

By 1900, Janesville was a small but modern city. The commercial district boasted one building with an elevator, and streets with electric lighting and modern transportation. The horse-drawn street railway was rebuilt with electric cars in 1892, and by 1900, concrete curbs and gutters replaced old plank sidewalks. Over the next decades, the city's reputation was based on its manufacturing enterprises, notably the production of automobiles and fountain pens, as General Motors' Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants and the Parker Pen Company rose to be the area's principal employers. All of these concerns had their origins in the central business district, but expanded their plants at the edges of the city.

FRED. L. CLARK,
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN
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AND
PRESERVED FRUITS,
Cigars, Tobacco, &c.

Cor. Main & Mil. sts., Janesville, Wis.

JOHN W. NOYES,
GROCERIES, PROVISIONS,
FRUITS, FRESH FISH, SHELL, KEG AND CAN
OYSTERS, CLAMS, LOBSTERS, HALLIBUT,
And all kinds of Confectionery.
One Door above the American House, Janesville, Wis.
CASH PAID for all KINDS OF COUNTRY PRODUCE.

JOHN THOMSON,
(LATE FROM SCOTLAND),
MERCHANT TAILOR,
IS PREPARED TO DO ALL KINDS OF WORK
ON SHORT NOTICE.
East Milwaukee Street. - - Janesville, Wisconsin.

*Owen's Rock County
Business Directory, 1876.*



*Main Street grocer, I.C.
Brownell, about 1901.*

RCBS

THE HEART OF THE CITY

RCHS



The intersection of Main and Milwaukee Streets was once "anchored" by four prominent business blocks. The Myer's House, a hotel and business block at the southeast corner, opened in 1861. Its early retail tenants included Sonnebarn and Company, clothiers; Edward Connell's grocery; George Reum's meat market; and the Richard and Buckingham saloon. The building contained 100 rooms and cost \$60,000 to construct. The hotel continued in operation until 1958. Photograph 1888.

Several business organizations were concerned with the development of the city. The Janesville Advancement Association was founded in 1905 for the purpose of attracting new industries, and the Janesville Chamber of Commerce also saw the need to plan for change in the downtown. In 1920, the Chamber hired city planner John Nolen of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to develop a park and planning scheme for the city. In his report to the Chamber he wrote: "it is believed that Janesville may stand high in the list of cities making very rapid growth during the decade which we have just entered. Will that growth be orderly or haphazard? Will improvement be piecemeal or according to a comprehensive plan?" Nolen recommended a thoroughfare system, the development of the Rock River for park and recreation purposes, and the adoption of a zoning ordinance.

Downtown construction generally came to a halt between 1929 and the end of World War II. Following the war, several proposals were made to improve the downtown area; one notable project was the construction of a parking lot over the Rock River. The lot, completed in 1963, spans the area between Dodge and Court Streets. The demand for downtown parking was symptomatic of the struggle to fit an automobile-oriented culture into the spaces designed for earlier modes of transportation. Although the horsecar service begun in the 1880s initiated Janesville's pattern of decentralization, the greatest impact occurred almost a century later. The construction of I-90 at the city's far east side and the opening of the Janesville Mall in the early 1970s were among events that eventually led to the closing of many downtown businesses. Empty stores, poor maintenance and drastic remodeling of once-handsome downtown buildings were the most visible effects of these changes.

THE HEART OF THE CITY



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However, the early 1970s also marked an increased national and regional awareness of the problems of declining shopping areas, as well as the historic and cultural significance of historic buildings like those found in Janesville's downtown. The interest in historic preservation extended not only to distinctive house museums such as the Tallman house, but to the "everyday" buildings at the center of the city.

Main Street, looking northwest from Court Street, ca. 1888.

Public and private efforts to maintain the vitality and appearance of Janesville's commercial center began with Project Facelift, a community effort organized by the Greater Janesville Corporation in the early 1970s. Further planning has focused on business strategies to keep firms downtown. The sensitive revitalization of historic buildings is a cornerstone of improvement efforts, and a variety of programs have been developed to help property owners finance exterior work. The *Downtown Plan and Revitalization Strategy* adopted by the City Plan Commission in 1988 recognized that "the presence of the Rock River and a substantial number of historically and architecturally significant structures along Main Street and Milwaukee Street help define the image of the city and contribute to the urban fabric of the downtown."



RCHS

The intersection of N. Franklin and W. Milwaukee Streets about 1890. The Corn Exchange and a cast-iron fountain are at left.

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Janesville's Commercial Building Types and Styles



Downtown grocers and their shops, ca. 1900. R.H. Pickering was located on South Main Street.

The earliest commercial structures on both sides of the river were typically one-, two-, and three-story frame buildings that were eventually replaced by those of brick. Two primary commercial building types are representative of the period between 1845 and 1900. Narrow, party-wall stores that housed a retail business at the first level, and apartments or offices above, were most prevalent. The shopkeeper and his or her family often resided above the business. Good examples of this building type still stand on North and South Main Streets. Large business blocks, usually constructed on prominent corner lots, provided for a number of businesses at the ground level and many offices and apartments above. The Lappin-Hayes Block at 2 South Main is the city's best remaining example. The large business blocks also provided public halls and meeting rooms that served performances, fraternal organizations, and a variety of other purposes. Eventually, many of these halls were replaced by theaters and opera houses. Some fraternal organizations built their own business blocks, renting out the ground floor shops.

Large, multi-story hotels were once an important building type in downtown Janesville. Typically, the hotels housed ground-floor saloons and businesses as well as lodging rooms. There are few surviving examples of nineteenth-century hotels; several have been recycled for other uses. Single and multiple-family dwellings were also interspersed with commercial buildings throughout the downtown, but most have been razed and their sites rebuilt in recent years.

Commercial Facades

The commercial facade served to advertise the business within the building to the passerby. Whether constructed in 1858 or 1908, the typical commercial building was provided with a prominent display window. Awnings and a variety of signs also occupied this zone of display space. The architectural treatment of the upper stories was usually concentrated at the windows and the roofline. Few examples of the popular Greek Revival style—often employed in the construction of Janesville's earliest commercial buildings—survive. Greek Revival style buildings were characterized by simple, regularly-placed windows with straight wood or stone sills and lintels and classical detail.

More examples of the Italianate style, and the highly decorated High Victorian Italianate survive. Builders employed round-arched windows and elaborate window surrounds, and ornate or deep, overhanging cornices to create a rich surface. These styles were popular between about 1855 and 1880.



The Hyatt House was built in 1857–1857 at the northwest corner of West Milwaukee and North Franklin Streets. The five-story hotel was known as one of the best in the state, and housed a variety of retail shops at the ground floor, including a jewelry store and barber shop. The building reportedly cost \$140,000 to construct, and was destroyed by fire in 1867.

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Prominent rounded bays and corner towers, and a variety of pressed-metal or shingled detail are typical of the Queen Anne style, favored by builders between about 1880 and 1905. Dark red brick, often with limestone trim, is typical. It is not unusual to see an Italianate style commercial block of the 1860s that was remodeled with Queen Anne style elements in the 1890s.

Turn-of-the-century builders turned away from the rich surface textures and decoration of the previous decades in favor of classical motifs. The plain wall of the facade was often divided horizontally by brick stringcourses, and a pediment replaced the cornice. The prominent display window remained, however.

From the 1920s and 1930s, there are several good examples of Moderne or Art Deco treatments. Some are remodelings of earlier structures; to the Italianate/Queen Anne style storefront, a glass front was sometimes added. Geometric, particularly “zig-zag” motifs and smooth, shiny wall surfaces characterize these buildings.

Local Materials and Builders

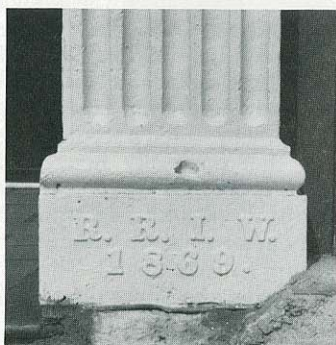
Locally quarried or manufactured building materials are evident in the brick, ornamental stone trim, and cast iron of many early storefronts. While butter-colored cream brick was very fashionable from the mid-1850s through the 1870s, red brick made in Janesville was more commonly employed. A series of fires in the 1860s increased the demand for fireproof masonry construction.

Several architects worked on the design of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commercial buildings in Janesville, but most buildings are the product of local builders working with plans derived from builders' books. Prefabricated parts, notably cast-iron columns and pressed metal bays and cornices, made possible elaborate details without the labor of skilled craftsmen. From one Wisconsin city to another, there are great similarities in the appearance of commercial buildings; the organization as well as the ornamental details of the facades were often derived from a well-established repertoire. Downtown Janesville is particularly significant for both its remaining handful of very distinctive buildings—such as the Fredendall and Lappin-Hayes Blocks—and its considerable number of still-intact streetscapes composed of smaller buildings.

The tour begins at the Janesville Public Library, 64 S. Main Street. (See tour map, inside front cover.)



Italianate window detail, the Fredendall Block.



Manufactured by the Rock River Iron Works, Janesville.

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