

The Tallest Building in Baraboo

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Which is the tallest building in Baraboo? Or, more accurately, which building has the most stories? Let's include West Baraboo in this puzzle also. And, how and why was it built?

Well, West Baraboo has the Clarion Hotel, with four stories, but that is not the tallest, nor is it even in the city. Neither is the new Oaks Park Place complex. The hospital seems to have a fourth story in one small area, but it does not qualify either. How about the West Square Building---no, only four stories, six if you count the smaller tower section.

However, within a good golf drive from that building, you will find a seven story building, the Donahue Terrace Apts. You can make a good case for it being seven stories! How? Both North and South sides have six stories, but the North side, because of the slanting land, has its sixth floor a story higher than the sixth floor on the South. Drive by and take a look. That adds up to seven.

In the Beginning

To those of us who remember the events leading up to the building of Donahue, it might be considered a monument to the Kiwanis Club members who conceived it. Of the Club Committee of eleven, only five survive today, but in their time they were the

business and industrial leaders of the community.

Many are gone now, men such as Chet Corson, Garner Smith, Elmer Johnson, Maurice Jones, John Sharratt, John Hoppe, and Bob Kent. Still with us, thankfully, are Ken Nelson, Bill Mossman, Matt Pinion, and Max Hermann. Dick Wilkinson no longer lives in Baraboo, and we've lost track of John Roelse and Fritz Wagner...

Most of the early meeting minutes survive in the possession of the Kiwanis Club, and the first entry is in December 1974, consisting of simply a couple of Federal Government bulletins that someone must have requested regarding federal funds available for community improvement. If memory serves, it was Fritz Wagner who sparked the appointment of a Kiwanis committee to explore the possibilities.

As Kiwanis President, Ken Nelson chaired the exploratory meeting on January 13, 1975, and introduced Wagner as the Convener. Feeling their way, they weren't even sure that if a project came along, they would personally only be the catalyst, and have to get others to implement it, whatever it might be. Assignments had been made at the previous Kiwanis meeting, and each member reported on his assignment.

A Dynamite Committee

Corson had investigated the Federal Housing and Community Development Act, Hermann reported on downtown parking as a project, Mossman reported on Circus World needs, and other members reported their assignments. Hoppe cautioned that to get funds they must demonstrate need, and also show whether the committee had authority to represent the city.

Apparently they did both. For frequent meetings, look at their



**The Donahue Apartments on First Avenue, conceived
in 1974 by a Kiwanis Committee**

schedule---four more meetings in January alone, complete with scholarly minutes, and more in February, March, and April, by which time Mayor Madalon was petitioning the Federal Housing Authority on behalf of the city, and Senators and Representatives had been enlisted.

There is no way this short article can report fully on this matter, but the notes will be at Historical Society for those interested. Suffice to say, this was a dynamite committee devoted to the betterment of their city. Community surveys were made to support the need for low income housing, the present site was selected, and a cooperative and progressive young city council promptly did their part.

City Becomes Involved

By April 3 application for housing assistance had been completed, along with recommendations on downtown parking, a Parkway, and an Industrial Park. Here the documents end, except for a mailgram from Corson and Madalon to Senator Proxmire reporting a local unemployment rate of 14% and appealing for help.

Here ends the file on this enterprising Kiwanis committee and its aggressive promotion of city improvement. It is believed the housing project now became the responsibility of the city, and that the present Community Development Authority (CDA) was developed to assume responsibility. Donahue Terrace's opening was celebrated on Oct. 1, 1978.

How the name Donahue became attached to the structure is not clear, as Mr. Donahue did not participate in the pioneering work of the committee, or of the early CDA board. Kiwanis probably declined putting its own name on the building. The height of the building is a

surprise also, but the city had a ladder fire truck, purchased in 1963.

The CDA Today

Under the management skills of Pat Hamilton, the structure currently has 18 men and 44 women as residents. The CDA also manages Corson Square, and both structures are still subsidized by the federal HUD. They didn't call it stimulus then, but without federal aid construction and maintenance of this facility would be unlikely.

It was a growing time for Baraboo: Acreage for the industrial park was purchased, the remodeled civic center would soon open, and an addition at Boo-U was approved.

Grease was playing at the Al. Ringling, the schools were excellent, and the future of the city looked bright indeed.