

Stevens Block  
724-728 North Milwaukee Street  
Milwaukee  
Milwaukee County  
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-257

HABS  
WIS  
40-MILWA,  
19-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## STEVENS' BLOCK

HABS  
WIS  
40-MILWA  
19-

Location: 724-728 North Milwaukee Street (formerly 420-422 Milwaukee Street; east side of North Milwaukee between East Wisconsin Avenue and East Mason Street), Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

Present Owner: First Wisconsin Trust Company

Present Occupants: Ground floor, north side (728 North Milwaukee)-- Harry J. Sinski, Inc. (women's apparel shop); ground floor, south side (724 North Milwaukee)-- Camera House; second story (entrance at 726 North Milwaukee)--office and studio of Genesio A. Simotti, landscape architect, and apartments of K. Baughman and D. J. Tennessen; third floor-- apartments of N. P. Ross and A. G. Schultz.

Present Use: Shops, offices, and apartments

Statement of Significance: This three-story stone building is a particularly ornamental and reasonably well-preserved example of the small nineteenth-century commercial block in Milwaukee. It is part of an attractive ensemble of stores, all dating from the 1860's and 1870's, which still stand in this block along the east side of North Milwaukee Street.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The date stone on the facade reads "1877". On April 11 and 13, 1877, the Milwaukee Sentinel reported that Stevens planned to build on the site and on September 8, 1877, announced that his store was "rapidly approaching completion and will be ready for occupation before the winter sets in."
2. Architect: Edward Townsend Mix of Milwaukee. Mix (1831-1890) was born and raised in New Haven, and was apprenticed for six years to Richard Upjohn, a New York architect who was a leading proponent of Gothic Revival architecture. He came to Milwaukee in 1856 after a period of practice in Chicago in association with William W. Boyington, architect of Chicago's famous Water Tower. During the course of his practice in Milwaukee, Mix produced a wide variety of buildings, ranging from flamboyant Victorian

designs to meticulously correct Gothic Revival forms. He was particularly noted for his fine ecclesiastical architecture. His Milwaukee churches include All Saints' Episcopal Church (WIS-265), Immanuel Presbyterian Church (WIS-263), and St. Paul's Episcopal Church (WIS-271). An example of his domestic architecture is the Jason Downer house (WIS-260).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The store was erected for John C. Stevens, dealer in plumbing and gas fixtures and plumbing contractor. It later belonged to William Reckmeyer and under the terms of his will passed to the First Wisconsin Trust Company in 1943.
4. Builders and suppliers: Not recorded. The contractor may have been Sherburne Bryant of Milwaukee who was involved in the construction of a precisely contemporary, similarly designed block of stores just south of the Stevens building on Milwaukee Street.
5. Original plans: None
6. Alterations and additions: Those documented by building permits are as follows:
  - a. 1909 (No. 10146): Unspecified changes, costing \$500, in the front and one entrance for John C. Stevens, owner, by William Schuchardt, Milwaukee architect.
  - b. 1926 (No. 32653): Construction of a steel shed 19'-6" x 30' at the rear (southeast corner) of the building by Esline Co., contractor.
  - c. 1930 (No. 22960): Installation of the fire escape on the facade for William Reckmeyer, owner, by the C. Hennecke Co. of Milwaukee. The cost was \$485 and the work was finished by January 9, 1931.
  - d. 1950-56: The permits per se are no longer on file, but a summary sheet states that electrical work was done and a water heater, awning, and signs were installed during these years.
  - e. 1959 (No. 86403): This permit records installation of an air conditioner and fan motor at Camera House, 724 North Milwaukee.
  - f. 1965 (No. 120702): New fluorescent lights and outlets were installed at the Camera House.

- g. 1969 (No. 232960): The permit records a new sign at the Camera House.

The two street level store fronts of Stevens' Block have been modernized. Above street level, the most apparent exterior changes include the addition of a fire escape and the obliteration of the stone plates which read "Stevens Block". The interior retains much of its original character: lofty ceilings and few room divisions. The northwest corner room on the second floor (now part of the landscape architect's suite) has a vault reportedly installed during William Reckmeyer's tenure. Changes in the second and third stories consist mainly of repeated painting and redecorating. At an unspecified date electricity and the existing heating system were installed.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: There is a reproduction of a tiny drawing of the facade, dated 1883, in the collection of the Milwaukee County Historical Society. The same collection includes a photograph of the building seen from the northwest which dates, apparently, from the 1930's.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building permits and other records, 1909-1969, General Office, Inspector of Buildings, 1010 Municipal Building, Milwaukee.

Inspection of the building August 7 and 14, 1969.

Interviews with Truman Schultz, landscape architect with the Genesio Simotti firm, 726 North Milwaukee, and with Larry Schwade, owner of Camera House, 724 North Milwaukee, August 7, 1969.

Milwaukee Sentinel Index, Local History Room, Milwaukee Public Library.

Records of ownership, Records and Research, 509 City Hall, Milwaukee.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

"Among Architects and Builders," Milwaukee Sentinel, April 13, 1877, 3.

"Architects and Builders," Milwaukee Sentinel,  
September 8, 1877, 8.

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of the Stairs," Milwaukee Journal, May 14, 1967,  
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Milwaukee, 1877, 71-72.

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Perrin, Richard W. E., Milwaukee Landmarks, Milwaukee,  
1968, 59.

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Prepared by Mary Ellen Wietczykowski  
1111 North Astor Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
September 1, 1969

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The eclectic structure is one of a series of store fronts along North Milwaukee Street that were built in the 1860's-1880's. The three-story stone building has housed various tenants and different businesses over the years. These small, ornate buildings with narrow frontage are fast disappearing from the central business district. The building is typical of its era of construction.

2. Condition of fabric: Good

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The Stevens Block is a long, narrow, three-story masonry structure with the lower floor projecting to the rear beyond the upper floors. Similar

buildings abut the Stevens Block on the north and south sides. The width of the building is 40 feet 2 inches.

2. Foundation: Foundation walls are of both brick and stone resting upon what is assumed to be stone footings.
3. Wall construction: The second and third floors are of stone that has been covered at some time by a thin coat of cement. The front (west) facade is divided into three bays crowned by an ornate, projecting stone cornice. A decorative pediment rises above the central bay. The pediment frames a recessed arch which is defined by a molded arch. Within the recessed center of these arches is a high relief masonry banner on which was written the name of the building, "Stevens Block". Although these letters have been removed, their shadows are legible. At the very center of the arches is the date of the building, 1877. The front (west) facade is decorative and makes use of pilasters, pseudo-pilasters, string courses, and stone lintels, both flat and slightly arched. The lintels have simulated decorative keystones. The color of the front facade is a cement gray. The rear walls are of the Milwaukee cream-city pressed brick. A fire escape is attached to the front of the building.
4. Framing: Masonry bearing wall construction
5. Chimneys: Not visible
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entry to the upper floor is centrally located on the front facade. It has two panelled doors, each having a single, tall, narrow light with a gable head. There is a curved transom light above. The doors are painted a dark green and appear to be original. The entry is set in an arched-stone opening. The doors to the shops on either side are not original. The rear door to the dress shop on the north has a "Z"-framed plank door set in a flat arch of header brick. The rear door to the camera store has been removed and a one-story steel frame addition has been built.
  - b. Windows: Second and third story windows are wooden, double hung, one-over-one lights. They are grouped into three bays, each defined by lintels. The central bay is a group of three windows while the two flanking bays are composed of two windows each. Within each bay individual windows are set apart from each other by pilasters.

At the second story the two flanking bays are defined by slightly curved lintels with simulated keystones. The central bay is distinguished from the others by the flat lintel which curves slightly over the center window with a simulated keystone. There is a plain string course below the sill line between the first and second floors.

At the third story the two flanking bays are defined by flat lintels with simulated keystones. The central bay projects slightly from the building and, as in the case of the second story, has a flat lintel which curves slightly over the center window with a simulated keystone. There is a decorative string course below the sill line, between the second and third floors.

All of the windows on the rear of the building are double-hung wooden units set in flat arches of header bricks. The third floor has five windows of four-over-four lights. The second floor has paired windows that flank four-over-four sashes on either side, a single four-over-four unit, and one small single-light fixed sash. The first floor has two windows with four-over-four lights on the dress shop (north) section of the building. The camera shop (south) has a projecting steel addition attached to the south half of the building.

7. Roof: The building has a flat, built-up, wooden-frame roof. A large skylight, glazed only on its north face, is centrally located on the roof. Two skylights are located on the rear addition of the first floor.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Two shops are located on the first floor on either side of the main entry to the second floor. Their fronts and interiors have been considerably altered. The main entry opens to a single-run stair leading to the second floor foyer, where there are ten doors opening into various apartments and also one closet door. The foyer has three large windows and two small high windows. Centered in the ceiling of the foyer is an open light well that penetrates the third floor. The office in the northwest corner contains double-doors between rooms and a marble mantelpiece. Reportedly, similar fireplaces exist in the other apartments. The third floor foyer has a skylight that illuminates the second floor through the light-well. This opening is surrounded by a wooden, white and gray painted balustrade. Thirteen doors open from

the foyer into two large apartments on this floor. Two high, square windows, and two large windows open onto the foyer as well.

2. Stairways: The main entry to the second floor is centrally located on the front facade. The staircase has a barrel roof. The steps are a straight run with one intermediate landing. There is an ornate newel post on the second floor with ornamental turnings. The newel post and rail are painted gray, the balusters white. A "U"-shaped staircase leads from the second to the third floor. The third floor newel post is square with a turned finial.
  3. Flooring: On the second floor there are narrow boards, 2- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 2- $\frac{3}{8}$  inches in width, painted gray and reported to be maple. The third-floor boards are about 6- $\frac{3}{8}$  inches in width, painted gray. They are probably pine.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster with painted wooden wainscoting in the stairwells.
  5. Doorways and doors: The wooden doors are four-panelled and painted. Some have a transom light; others do not.
  6. Trim: Heavily moulded painted wooden trim
  7. Hardware: The entry door has cast-iron hinges and a brass door handle. Much of the other door hardware has been replaced.
  8. Lighting: Electric
  9. Heating: Steam
- D. Site and Surroundings:

The building is one of a row of early store fronts facing on to North Milwaukee Street. The adjacent buildings abut on the north and south. There is an alley along the east.

Prepared by John N. DeHaas, Jr.  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
August, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1969 Milwaukee Project which was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman. The project was done under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, and the team members included architect John N. DeHaas, Jr. (Montana State University), Project Supervisor, Mary Ellen Wietczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission), Project Historian, and student architects Larry Hermsen (Iowa State University), Roger Little (Kansas University), Thomas Sanford (Washington State University), and Donna Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn R. Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed and Philip Hamp. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack Boucher.