

## **Historical Significance**

The Lower Fox River Waterway System, located along the Fox River between Lake Winnebago and the Bay of Green Bay, is historically significant as a complete and operable example of a river/canal, slack water transportation system dating from the mid-nineteenth century. While initially envisioned as part of a much larger Fox-Wisconsin Waterway, the Lower Fox River portion is the only remaining system in the State.

The De Pere Lock and Dam Historic District was listed in the State Register and National Register of Historic Places in 1993, along with seven other lock and dam sites along the Lower Fox River. These sites are significant for their role in Wisconsin's transportation history and engineering. The De Pere Historic District contains 2 contributing buildings (Lockshack and Lockkeeper's House), 3 contributing structures (De Pere Lock, Dam, and Canal), and 2 non-contributing resources (Storage Shed and Garage).

## **Architectural Significance**

The De Pere Lockkeeper's House is the focus of our report. It is an example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style, and features the character-defining gambrel roof with flared eaves. Exterior materials are used in combination, including cream colored stone at the foundation and basement; red brick at the first floor; and green painted wood shingles at the front and back porches, second floor gambrel ends, and dormers.

Period of significance is defined as the length of time a property is associated with the important historic activities which qualify it for National Register listing. The period of significance for the De Pere Lockkeeper's House begins with its construction in 1912 and ends in 1936 when the lock was rebuilt for the last time, signifying the last major improvement to the site by the Army Corps of Engineers.

## **Design & Construction**

Plans for this two-story house were prepared in 1911 under the direction of Major G.S. Bromwill by L.M. Mann, Assistant Engineer at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office in Oshkosh. Bids for the construction of the house were opened on January 2, 1912, and a contract was executed within weeks to carpenter Peter Francken and mason John J. Broekman for \$3,100. The house was sited a narrow dyke of land, sometimes referred to as Government Island, on April 4, 1912, and construction took place between April and August of 1912.<sup>29</sup>

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The house featured a full basement with a rainwater cistern in the northeast corner. On the first floor, one entered the house from a central, open air porch into the living room. Because the De Pere site was unique in that it had a separate Lockkeeper's Shack, the house had a formal dining room in the southeast corner in lieu of an office which appears at the other sites. Typical of houses of this time, it is assumed that the house did not originally have running water and was

originally heated with a series of wood or coal fired stoves which were connected to the central chimney.

### **Alteration & Use**

The Rabbideau Hardware Company installed a centralized hot air heating system in the house in 1926. This furnace was presumably fueled by coal which was delivered by barges to various industries along the Fox River's lock system. As such, a small coal storage room was built in the southeast corner of the basement. In 1927, the De Pere Lockkeeper's House was modernized with running water and baths.

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Similar to four other Dutch Colonial Revival style Lockkeeper's Houses, the original open front porch was enclosed at some point in time, and that time has been a point of speculation in prior studies. We can point to a range of time between 1930 and 1952 when this porch was enclosed. Knowing that construction work at the Lockkeeper's Houses was often undertaken during the fall to spring off-season when one lockkeeper was replaced by another, we hypothesize that the porch may have been enclosed between the fall of 1948 and the spring of 1949.

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Between 1960 and 1964, the coal-fired gravity fed heating system was replaced with a new oil burning furnace and a 275-gallon oil storage tank. It was also around this time period that the Ruechel family reported other modifications: the living room was carpeted, all of the windows throughout the house were replaced, and the kitchen was remodeled into a kitchenette.

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In the winter of 1973 and 1974, the Army Corps of Engineers funded \$14,000 in modernizations to the house, stripping the interior of its historic finishes. With the exception of the stairway, all of the original interior trim was removed and replaced with ranch casings. Nearly all of the original interior doors were replaced with hollow core flush veneer doors with new hardware. The floors were covered with wall-to-wall carpeting, the walls were either wallpapered, paneled, or both, and two-foot by four-foot acoustical panel ceilings were dropped in all the rooms except the kitchenette. It was reported by the Burt family that original dining room was subdivided to create a front closet, hall, and bathroom so that the former upstairs bathroom could be converted into a bedroom to aid in accommodating six of the Burt's seven children.

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Similar to the other lock sites, the De Pere Lockkeeper's House was vacated in October 1983 and all but abandoned by the Corps of Engineers. As the State agency charged with the maintenance and operation of the Lower Fox River lock and dam sites, the Fox River Navigational System Authority's primary goals are to restore the lock system, sustain river navigation, and eventually create a heritage corridor along the river. They have recently invested funds to preserve the

exteriors of several lockkeeper's houses and are currently maintaining the exteriors of these buildings as monuments.

But the questions remains, now that the exteriors have been restored, what should be done with the building in the future?

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## **Consultations With Key Stakeholders**

Several stakeholders were identified, including the Fox River Navigational System Authority (FRNSA), the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), the City of De Pere, and other parties with a vested interest in the community. A series of public meetings were held to open the dialogue with civic groups and the general public. These dialogues explained the purpose of this study and sought the civic groups' input on ideas, concepts, and how the De Pere Lockkeeper's House could integrate with and further enhance the community. The meetings also included dialogues with the City of De Pere elected and appointed officials and planning, engineering, public works, and park and recreation departments. Local knowledge was gathered, and municipal input of the concepts put forth was sought out.

Stakeholder interviews completed as part of the Lockkeeper's House study identified an array of ideas for how the building and site could be adapted and reused. Ideas included:

- Bed & Breakfast / Hotel
- Artist live / work housing / art gallery
- Restaurant / concessions sales
- Meeting facility
- Three-season shelter for events / recreational programs
- Small boat / kayak launching / rental facilities
- Living history museum, linking with other attractions such as Heritage Hill and the De Pere Historic Society, hosting historic reenactments, or linked with the story of Fox River.
- Wildlife / bird viewing / fishing
- Weigh in location for fishing tournaments

## **Fox River Navigational System Authority**

FRNSA views on the future uses for the De Pere Lockkeeper's House were the most open-ended. First and foremost, the FRNSA mandates that the historic integrity of the house be maintained. While the FRNSA is not authorized to sell the house, they would like to see the house put to good use by a long-term lessee who would be responsible for all the associated rehabilitation, operation, and maintenance costs. It is the FRNSA's hope that a lease could be negotiated that would actually be a source of income for them. If such an agreement cannot be negotiated, the FRNSA is willing to forgo the income generation as long as the use is deemed worthy. If a

suitable lessee and use cannot be found, the FRNSA is content to maintain the house as a monument.

### **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**

In evaluating the use options for the site, our approach focused on key policies and regulations that would affect the building's reuse. The De Pere Lockkeeper's House is located on Government Island, which is considered by the DNR to be an integral component of the De Pere Dam. The DNR and the Army Corps of Engineers are concerned about protecting the integrity of the dam and controlling the flow of water through the dam during periods of high water. Due to its flood prone nature, the standards for development on the dam are the strictest and the most difficult to comply with. The DNR is also concerned about protection wildlife habitat, including the local fisheries and aviaries, from poachers.

Of the most consequence to the successful adaptation of this house, and under the strictest interpretation of DNR regulations, structures intended for human habitation are prohibited in the Floodway District. This would preclude any residential, bed and breakfast, vacation rental, inn, or other forms of lodging that were suggested during the key stakeholder meetings and strongly considered as economically viable options during the preparation of this Economic Feasibility Study. The only permitted uses are those structures accessory to permanent open space uses such as Voyageur Park and the planned \$2.5 million dollar pedestrian bridge, river walk, and wildlife viewing platform.

### **City of De Pere**

After over two years of negotiations with the FRNSA, DNR, and the Army Corps of Engineers, the City is reluctant to pursue any avenue which may threaten the community's \$2.5 million investment in the pedestrian bridge, river walk, and wildlife viewing platform. Because of the DNR's concerns, negotiations to-date have included provisions that would limit the construction activity on the dam and would require raising of the pedestrian bridge daily after park closing from 11:00 pm to 6:00 am to prevent poachers and periodically during flood events. In the City's opinion, these negotiated restrictions would prohibit activities that would allow people to be on the island overnight, i.e.-residential or lodging. However, it is our belief that these concerns could be alleviated through lease language which would impose strict fines on persons found poaching or requiring access across the bridge after park closing.

### **Wisconsin Historical Society**

They pointed to Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 44 Historical Societies and Arts Board, which grants the WHS the duty to serve as the state's principal agency for administration of historic preservation activities; cooperate with federal, state, and local government agencies in the planning of undertakings affecting historic properties; and review and comment upon those actions of any state agency which may have an adverse effect upon historic properties and ameliorate those adverse effects. In general, this statute gives the WHS the lead role among other state agencies in negotiating the mitigation of potential adverse effects on historic

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In addition, they pointed to Chapter 87 of the Wisconsin Statutes, particularly section 87.305 *Use of certain facilities on St. Feriole Island*, as a precedent or case study of the negotiations that can take place between the WHS, the DNR, and a municipality. This piece of legislation was written specifically for the Dousman hotel on St. Feriole Island in the City of Prairie du Chien. It accommodated the leniency necessary to successfully re-use the building and allowed for modified floodproofing measures provided a flood warning system was installed and an emergency evacuation plan was instituted and tested annually and the rehabilitation was consistent with the standards used by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. A similar piece of legislation could be written for the De Pere Lockkeeper's House and the other remaining lockkeeper's houses along the Fox River.

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Due to the unique property conditions, the regulatory requirements are subject to much interpretation. An attempt at an exemption, variance, and new legislation to allow the most economically viable use is strongly recommended. In either case, close examination and careful negotiation between the FRNSA, the WHS, the DNR & the City of De Pere will be required during the planning process to ensure success in adaptively reusing the house.

### **Future Use - Active Recreational Shelter**

Given the information available at this time, it is unknown which stakeholder's point of view will prevail. We identified three future uses: an Active Recreational Shelter, an Institutional Office, and Heritage Tourism Lodging. In exploring these, we are not saying that these are the only suitable uses for the building, just 3 potential uses. A multitude of future uses could work.

Given the DNR's current standpoint, the House could be adaptively reused and rehabilitated as a public park shelter or recreational facility. It is envisioned that the site and building could accommodate features of a public comfort station with passive recreational activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and fishing, but also more active recreational activities such as canoe and kayak lessons, rentals, and trips; boat, jet ski, water ski, and tube rentals; sport and charter fishing headquarters. In addition to providing support for these recreational activities, the building could also accommodate educational uses (such as boater's safety), and interpretive and administrative functions. The key to the successful re-use of this property as an Active Recreational Shelter will not only be dependent upon summer tourists, but also largely dependent upon year round use supported by local residents and students of St. Norbert College.

### **Institutional Office**

Based on the City's concerns, the House could be adaptively reused and rehabilitated as a branch office for a governmental or institutional entity. It is envisioned that the site could be a draw for

governmental agencies that regulate the river, lock, or dam or the natural fish and bird habitat or it could be attractive to an educational institution that studies the same. The building could accommodate educational, interpretive, and administrative functions to support such a use. The planned river walk and wildlife viewing pier would be enticing features for the entity and additional site amenities such as kayaks, canoes, boats, and a dock may further aid the tenant.

### **Heritage Tourism Lodging**

The De Pere Lockkeeper's House could be adaptively reused and rehabilitated for heritage tourism lodging where the entire house would be rented out on a daily or weekly basis to up to eight guests who are drawn to the site for its unique blend of cultural, historical, and recreational features. Again, the planned river walk, wildlife viewing pier, kayaks, canoes, boats, and a dock would be enticing features for the guests.

### **Rehabilitation Cost Analysis**

The opinions of probable construction costs provided were made on the basis of information available to us in the Spring of 2011, the recommendations outlined in the Historic Structures Report, our assumptions of the scope of work, and our professional judgment and expertise.

Active Recreational Shelter    \$636,065

Institutional Office                \$556,955

Heritage Tourism Lodging    \$408,344

It is assumed that the Active Recreational Shelter will involve some governmental entity which will trigger use of prevailing wage rates, a legislative effort to provide unionized labor a fair chance to bid for government contracts. In our experience, this generally increases the cost of construction by a factor of 10%.

In addition, both the Active Recreational Shelter and Institutional Office would be considered commercial buildings, requiring structural and accessibility upgrades to meet state and federal regulations. Heritage Tourism Lodging would be considered a residential use that would not require such modifications, thereby costing less to rehabilitate.

The bottom line is that the interior of the building needs extensive rehabilitation work, and it will be quite costly no matter the use.

### **Economic Viability**

Given the uses described previously, our economic consultant estimated Annual facility rental payments of \$7,000 to \$8,000, Food and beverage commissions of about \$18,700 per year, Concession purchases of about \$10,000, canoe / kayak rental of \$40,000 to \$45,000 among other things. The conceptual operation of the Active Recreational Shelter has potential to generate meaningful gross cash flow, in the range of \$100,000 to \$115,000 per year. The revenue streams

will all be highly dependent on the ingenuity and aggressiveness of the operator. The ability to connect the island to downtown would facilitate opportunities, particularly the ability of the house to sustain a modest outdoor lunch and drink business.

The institutional office approach assumes that the structure can be renovated for use for unique office functions, ones that do not require significant public visitation. Downtown rents range from \$8 to \$12 per square foot, and rents for upper floor office spaces fall at the top end of this range, with Class A rents reported at \$13 per square foot. Assuming a 1,200-square-foot building and rents of \$13 per square foot per year, the resulting revenue stream of about \$15,000 per year would be the result. After expenses associated with the building, revenue available of about \$10,000 would be able to service about \$130,000 in debt.

The heritage tourism concept assumes that the house is renovated for residential use and rented out on a seasonal / annual basis to individual tenants. Assuming a year-round rental, with monthly rents of \$0.75 per square foot on a 1,200-square-foot house would amount to monthly rent of \$900, or annual rent of \$10,800. After expenses, about \$7,020 per year would remain, which could service about \$90,000 in debt.

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The reality is that none of the potential future uses identified were financially feasible because of the amount of rehabilitation required. This risk factor alone would be problematic for traditional bank financing. The future success of this project will take an aggressive operator with financial backing of their own.

This document is a stepping stone. It contains a framework of lots of useful information for whatever happens to the building in the future. It can also be used as a tool at the other seven lockkeeper's houses as well. The historic structures report is a document that offers benchmarks that should be followed closely for the rehab. The economic feasibility study should be used as a guide or suggestion. For these reasons, we ask that you accept the document and place it on file.