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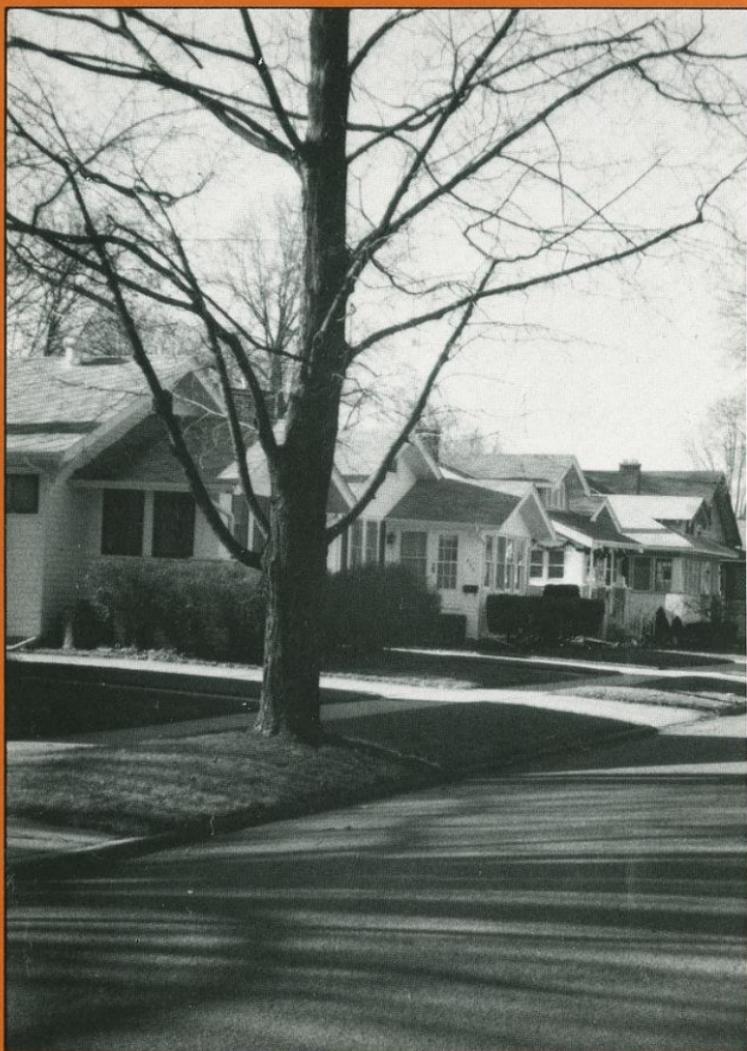
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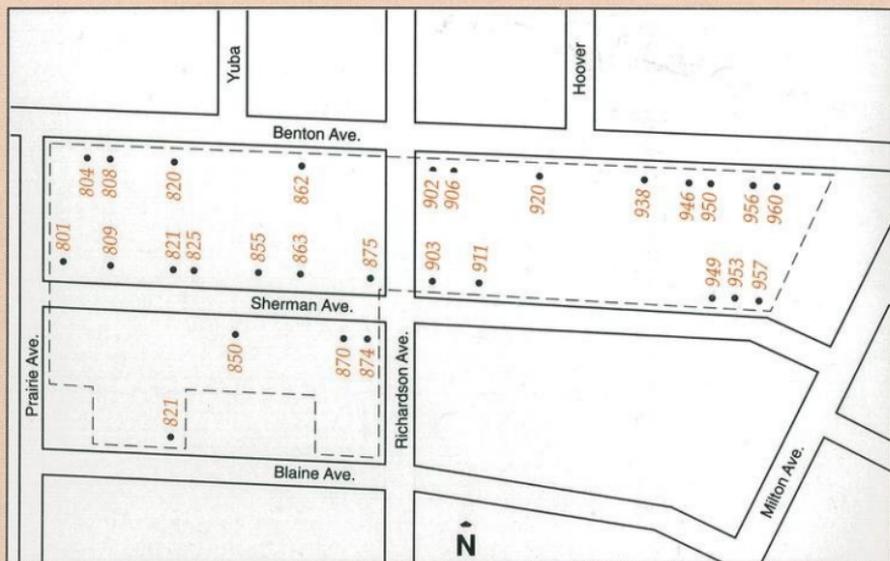


The
Benton Avenue
Historic District



A Guide

Benton Avenue Historic District Tour Map



Benton Avenue Historic District Tour Sites •
 Benton Avenue Historic District Boundary — — —

The Benton Avenue
Historic District:
A Guide

Prepared
by
Landscape Research
for
The Janesville Historic Commission
Janesville, Wisconsin

1995



JOSEPH DRESEN,
ARCHITECT

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F. T. Hodgson was a leading distributor of plans for the popular bungalow. Shown here is the title page from *Practical Bungalows and Cottages for Town and Country* published in 1906. This copy was owned by architect Joseph Dresen of Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin. (Collection of Landscape Research.)

The Benton Avenue Historic District



The Benton Avenue Historic District is an urban oasis of small bungalows on Janesville's northeast side. These small but well-built houses are symbols of the rapidly created neighborhoods that were developed during the decade of economic development following World War I. One of the city's earliest tract house developments, the area was developed in response to the need for low-cost housing which accompanied the growth of Janesville's General Motors tractor factory. Benton, Blaine, and Sherman Avenues contain more examples of the Bungalow style than any other area of the city.

Janesville has long been a center of agricultural implement manufacture. Early firms such as the Janesville Machine Company were founded in the 1850s. The Samson Tractor Company, a division of the General Motors Corporation, purchased Janesville Machine in 1918. In 1919, a new factory was erected on Industrial Avenue for the manufacture of tractors. By 1922, however, tractor production proved unprofitable at this south side plant, and the facility was converted to automobile assembly. (It became and remains the city's most important employer.)

As the new Samson Tractor plant was being planned, many of Janesville's leading citizens became concerned about the lack of affordable housing for the expected influx of new workers. There were also concerns that outside speculators would flood the city with cheap, undesirable housing. Therefore, the Janesville Chamber of Commerce formed the Janesville Housing Corporation to raise funds for the construction of good quality, affordable housing. Workers at the new Samson Tractor factory were the primary market.

In early 1919, the sale of \$300,000 worth of stock in the Janesville Housing Corporation was begun. General Motors made a purchase of \$100,000 in the corporation. The proceeds were used to purchase lots and construct modestly-priced housing for workers, particularly those at Samson Tractor; by the summer of 1919, 26 houses near the factory were almost completed.

One of the objectives of the Janesville Housing Corporation was to discourage outside speculators from entering the working-class housing market, but the houses in the Benton Avenue Historic District were nevertheless created by an outside developer with previous experience in this market.

In 1919, the Chicago real estate firm of Matteson and Landstrom

The Benton Avenue Historic District

purchased a portion of the undeveloped land in the Scofield Addition. Among this firm's previous experience was a Flint, Michigan housing development for auto workers. In Janesville, Matteson and Landstrom platted the area into 110 small lots ranging in width from 40 to 45 feet. By the end of 1920, 79 houses were completed, and all 84 were finished within a few years. The National Register of Historic Places nomination for this area notes that "while there is little doubt that Matteson and Landstrom built their tract house development in hopes of attracting the workers of the new Samson Tractor factory, tax rolls and city directories indicate that their development was less than successful in attracting these workers." Few tractor factory employees settled here in the 1920s, possibly because the area was a fair distance from the factory, and because of competition from the Janesville Housing Corporation's development.

Through the 1920s, a number of Matteson and Landstrom houses were unsold and were rented by the developer, and others were held by absentee owners. City directories show a high turnover of occupants in all of the houses through the twentieth century.

The developers chose an economical but handsome building type for the Benton Avenue area. Following a national trend very popular in California, the Bungalow style was popular in Wisconsin between about 1910 and 1940. While the general term can be used to describe any small one-story house, the Bungalow style usually represents a one- and one-half story house with wide, often sloping roofs, large porches, and simple trim. Typical exterior details such as knee-brace brackets and exposed rafters and beams are concentrated at the roofline. Bungalows are typically clad in clapboard, brick or stucco; some examples have stone or brick trim. A prominent chimney mass is often found on even simple examples of the style. The Bungalow interior typically has an open plan and includes an abundance of hardwood trim, built-in cabinets and bookshelves; the interior could be richly or simply detailed depending on the budget. Builders also deviated from the standard California bungalow exterior into Swiss, Colonial, and Tudor variations.

In the Benton Avenue Historic District, there are several varieties of bungalow design. The 1994 National Register nomination identified the "one-story front gable bungalow," the "one and one-half story front gable bungalow with side wall dormer," the "one and one-half story bungalow with hipped roof and front dormer" and "the one and one-half story side gable bungalow." The primary types illustrated on the opposite page can be seen elsewhere in the city, but nowhere in such concentration.



Sherman Avenue streetscape, 1994.

The Benton Avenue Historic District



One-story front gable:
821 Blaine Avenue.
This example illustrates how affordable housing could be stylish with details from the popular Bungalow style.



One- and one-half story with side wall dormers:
875 Sherman Avenue.
Original exterior features including narrow clapboards and wood shingles have been maintained. Knee-brace brackets and exposed rafters are prominent decorative features.



One- and one-half story with hipped roof and front dormer:
956 Benton Avenue.
A porch supported by battered piers at the base is a typical feature of this bungalow type.



One- and one-half story side gable:
950 Benton Avenue.
This small house exemplifies the practical designs seen in neighborhoods throughout Janesville.



Knee brace bracket

The Benton Avenue Historic District

The Bungalow Style and American Arts and Crafts Design

The bungalows of the Benton Avenue Historic District have their distant roots in the California work of brothers Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene, Pasadena architects who practiced together from 1893 to 1914. The Greenes' exceptional buildings—which were nationally publicized in periodicals such as *House Beautiful* and *Ladies' Home Journal*—fused English Arts and Crafts and oriental motifs. Between about 1901 and 1940, the bungalow and the larger Craftsman house were popularized across the United States through many pattern books and periodicals. Among them was *The Craftsman*, a periodical published by Gustav Stickley between 1901 and 1916, and *Craftsman Homes*, published by Stickley in 1909.

Stickley (1858-1942) was a native of Osceola, Wisconsin. In the 1880s he settled in Binghamton, New York and at various times was in the furniture business with his two brothers Charles and Albert and Elgin A. Simonds. Stickley traveled to England in 1898, where he saw the work of Arts and Crafts designers such as C.F.A. Voysey and Charles R. Ashbee. The Arts and Crafts Movement in England was devoted to reconnecting the relationship between art and daily life, one that proponents felt had been severed by the Industrial Revolution. After his trip to England, Stickley promoted the unity of the bungalow (or the larger Craftsman house) and its furnishings. In America, Arts and Crafts devotees were focused on restoring comfort, convenience and simplicity to middle-class domestic life. Artistically conceived household products could satisfy consumer needs while bringing artistic quality into the household. Even the economical bungalow could be furnished with handsome, widely available oak furniture, rugs, and lighting as well as decorative ceramics and needlework inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Just as the pattern books of the early twentieth century provided models of exterior and interior taste, the current revival of interest in the Bungalow and Arts and Crafts topics has resulted in a new collection of books and periodicals. One, *American Bungalow*, a magazine published bi-monthly "in the interest of preserving and restoring the modest American Bungalow and the rich lifestyle that it affords" includes illustrations of restored interiors and exteriors. Sources for further reading include:

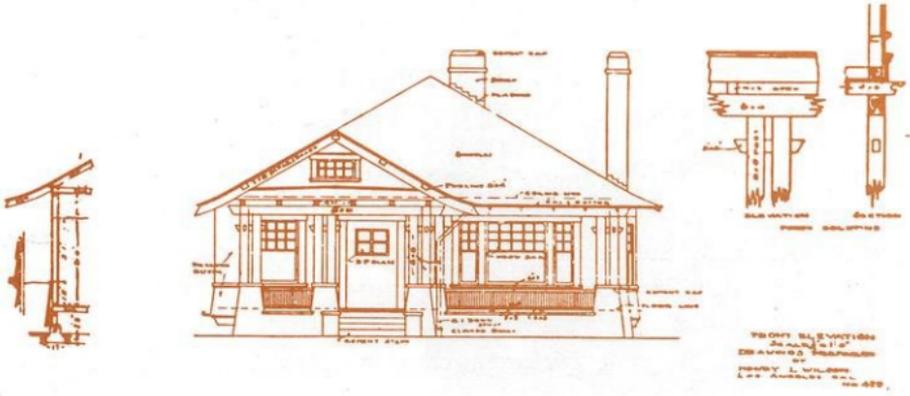
American Bungalow. Subscriptions through P.O. Box 756, Sierra Madre, CA 91025-756. Toll free number (800) 350-3363.

Boyd, Virginia and Lawrence J. Jacobsen. "Gustav Stickley: the Creation of Art Through Machine Production," *Wisconsin Academy Review* (Fall, 1993), 4-9.

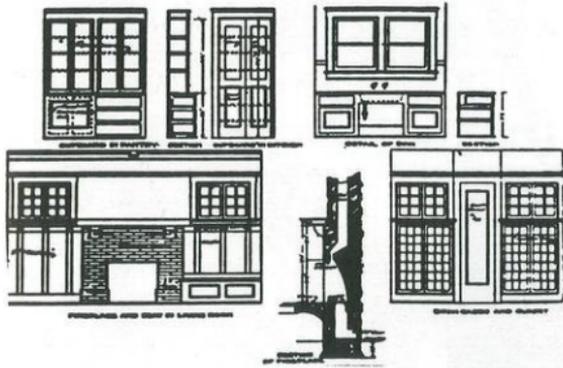
Comstock, William P. and Clarence E. Schermerhorn. *Bungalows Camps and Mountain Houses*. New York, N.Y.: W. T. Comstock Co., 1915. Reprint of the 1915 edition with an introduction by Tony P. Wrenn, Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990.

Stickley, Gustav. *Craftsman Homes*. New York, N.Y.: Craftsman Publishing Company, 1909. Reprint of the second edition by Dover Publications, New York, N.Y., 1979.

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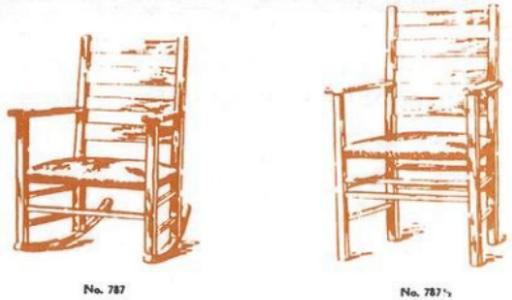
Bungalow plan from Henry L. Wilson's *Wilson's California Bungalows* (exact date of publication unknown). Wilson's catalog, which provided complete plans and specifications for the bungalow interior and exterior for \$10.00 per set, was typical of many of the teens and twenties. Wilson also began the publication of *Bungalow Magazine* in 1909.



Left: Interior details including fireplace, bookcases and closet from *Wilson's California Bungalows*. Many bungalow interiors featured built-in cabinets to maximize floor space.

While companies such as Wilson's offered only bungalow plans, between 1908 and 1940 Sears Roebuck and Company was among suppliers of complete pre-cut houses available by mail order. Sears' *Modern Homes and Building Plans* was the source of many bungalows built between 1925 and 1937. One model, the "Oakdale," which was similar to some of the houses built in the Benton Avenue Historic District, was described in *Modern Homes*:

One of the most popular types of home is the five-room bungalow. When it is as pretty and homelike as the Oakdale, it commands a good rental and selling price in any neighborhood. And when its rooms are of such comfortable size and arrangement as these with a convenience in almost every corner, it makes a home to which a family becomes more attached as time passes.



Above: Craftsman chairs like those originally found in many Bungalow Style houses.

Benton and Blaine Avenues



960 Benton
1919-20

This design is a variation of that represented by 821 Blaine Avenue and 863 Sherman Avenue. It has a broad front gable with a lower projecting gable. The porch is enclosed with single-light sash windows.



Benton Avenue streetscape

The houses on this block of Benton Avenue, with 964 at left, are typical of those built in the district between 1919 and 1920.



875 Blaine
1919-20



875 Blaine is a slightly larger house type employing the details seen on the smaller bungalows in the district. A cross-gable roof with prominent knee-brace brackets and sash with divided lights are among the distinctive features of the stucco exterior.

Sherman Avenue



821
1919-20

This clapboard-clad bungalow is significant for its open porch supported by tapered posts, gable end trim, and sash windows with divided upper lights. It is shown here between the bungalows at 817 and 825 Sherman Avenue.

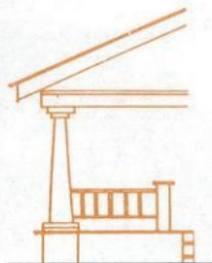


825
1919-20

A projecting gable-roofed entry porch occupies much of the front facade of this bungalow. The bungalow retains its original clapboards, and has sash windows with vertically-divided upper lights. The front porch has heavy square posts which rest on square piers, and a knee-bracket and wide vergeboards accent the gable ends.



856
1919-20



A tapered post

A porch with multi-paned sash and tapered posts is a handsome feature of this hipped-roof design. The gabled dormer has exposed rafter ends.

Sherman Avenue



863
1919-20

This bungalow features a hipped roof porch, and a jerkinhead main gable roof. The enclosed porch has tapered posts. The original clapboard exterior is intact.

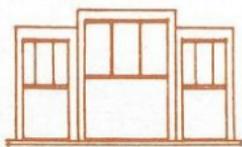


870
1919-20

Yet another variation of the house at 821 Blaine Avenue is represented by this Sherman Avenue design. The house has a broad main gable with a lower gable that forms the porch roof. The porch is enclosed with single-light sashes and features tapered wood posts which rest on square piers. A balustrade is clapboard-covered.



903
1919-20



Sash with divided lights

This hipped-roof brick bungalow sited on a prominent corner has several well-conserved original features. Gable-roofed dormers with three windows set in each end and a brick chimney mass are of special note. The upper sash have divided lights.

For Further Information

An excellent discussion of the architecture of Rock County is contained in *Rock County Historic Sites and Buildings*, written by Nancy B. Douglas and Richard P. Hartung and published by the Rock County Historical Society in 1976. Much of the information contained in this guide is found in the Benton Avenue Historic District research reports and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places prepared by Carol L. Cartwright for the Janesville Historic Commission (1993-4). These nominations are available at the Janesville Community Development Department, 18 N. Jackson Street (755-3180) and at the Division of Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison, Wisconsin, 53706 (608) 264-6498.

Among many general guides dealing with the development of American architectural styles are McAlester, Lee and Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) and Poppliers, John C. *What style is it?* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1983).

For further information on historic preservation programs in the City of Janesville, contact the Janesville Historic Commission, 18 North Jackson Street, Janesville, Wisconsin 53545 (608) 755-3085 or 755-3180.

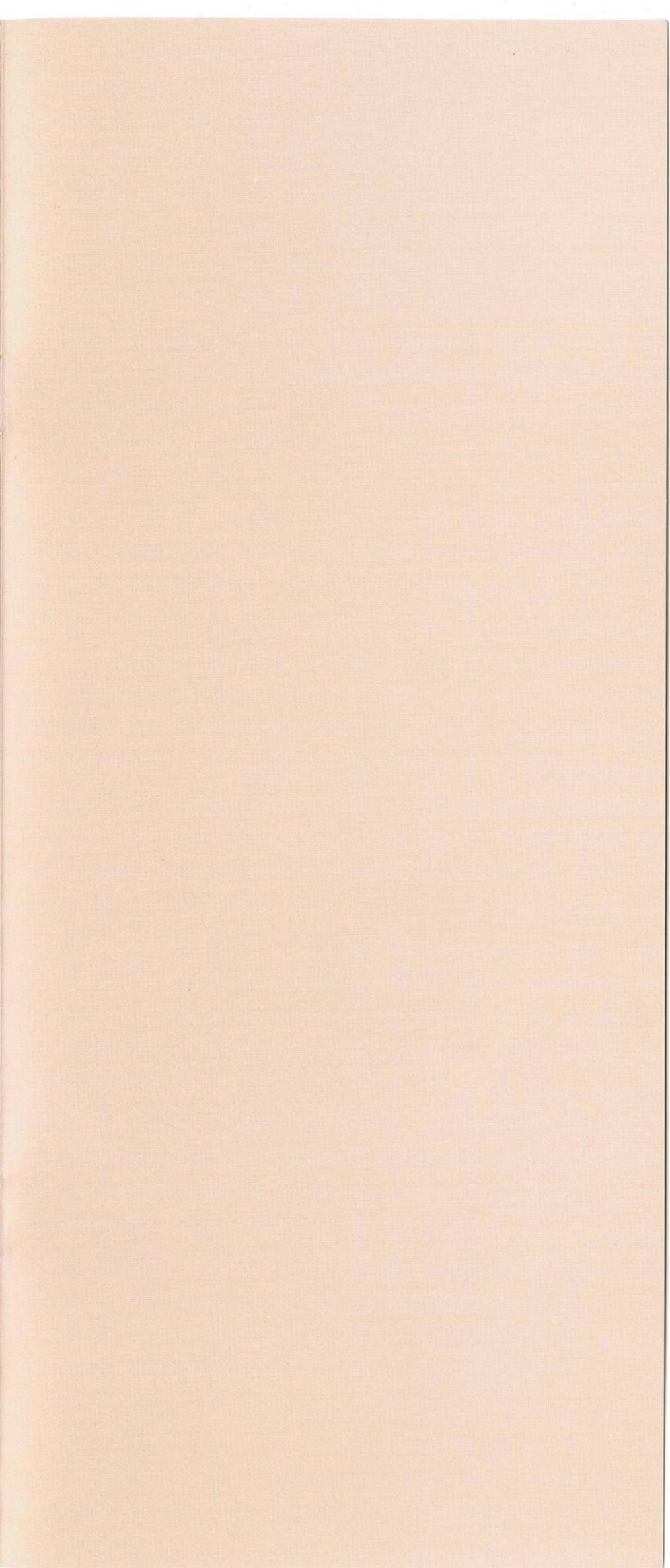
Written and designed by Carole Zellie of Landscape Research, St. Paul, Minnesota, for the Janesville Historic Commission. Photographs by Christine Schelshorn unless noted. Judith Adler of the Janesville Community Development Department provided assistance with the completion of the text.

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