The Cultural Landscape of West Mifflin Street Contents

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Early Period: 1890-1910

As downtown Madison expanded in the 1880s, the 400 and 500 blocks of West Mifflin Street remained an empty, swampy area bordered on the east by businesses adjacent to the state capital, and on the west by the railroad roundhouse, just past Bedford Street. By the early 1890s, enough waste from the adjacent railroad yard had been dumped to fill in the swampy land, making the 400 and 500 blocks finally fit for construction. By 1892, at least a dozen wooden frame houses covered the 400 block. The 500 block began to see houses after 1895. The period from 1895 to 1910 saw tremendous growth and construction on West Mifflin. The blocks were oriented to the railroad and resembled railroad towns across the country, with two-story homes with front gables and porches on narrow lots. While some houses were built as single-family homes, many were originally constructed or were quickly restructured to have two "flats", or apartments, for two families. The presence of multiple families in one house, and the fact that both men and women residents worked indicates that this was a working-class neighborhood. Many residents were employees of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad or other businesses within walking distance.

Postwar Period: 1935-1955

During this period, West Mifflin Street saw significant growth and development. By the 1930s, the 400 and 500 blocks were filled in with houses and tall leafy trees. By this time, most homes had been divided into apartment units. Sometime between 1908 and 1940, second-story porches were added to many of the houses. By the mid-1940s, houses and apartments frequently appeared in the "For Sale" section of the *Madison Wisconsin State Journal*. This reflects considerable turnover in the units, which is visible when looking at 502 West Mifflin Street. In addition to at least eight different groups living in the units between 1939 and 1950, a plumbing business and a welding business were run out of the home. By 1950 it was functioning as a rooming house with an on-site owner. In the postwar period, the residents of West Mifflin Street were still working class adults; the 1940 census indicates bookkeepers, musicians, carpenters, a truck driver, and an electrician living on the 500 block. This area's transition from family residences to student rentals occurred after this postwar period in conjunction with a change in University housing policy in 1966 that permitted more students to live off campus in private units.

Late Period: 2000-present

Since 2000, development of the 400 and 500 blocks of West Mifflin Street has been relatively slow compared to downtown and nearby areas such as the Bassett neighborhood. The Downtown Advisory Report of 2004 recommended that West Mifflin be redeveloped with four to five-story residential buildings featuring ground floor commercial spaces. No new development occurred as a result, and by 2012 the city still desired urban density and new downtown development. Because the existing housing continued to deteriorate, the Downtown Plan 2012 stated that, "maintaining the status quo for this area is not considered a realistic or desirable long-term solution." The plan called for a dense, urban, mixeduse neighborhood that supports downtown business and new business initiated by the University. Though the 2004 and 2012 plans called for mixed use housing, houses are on small lots and have multiple owners, making it difficult for both the City of Madison and property owners to assemble properties and redevelop the area. One new apartment building has been added since 2000, with an underground parking lot, reflecting parking trends and contemporary car culture around the city. However, the area has predominately retained its original early twentieth-century homes, which are in various states of disrepair. The only commercial space is ABC Health (formerly the Mifflin Street Co-op) at the intersection of North Bassett Street and West Mifflin Street. West Mifflin Street remains popular for student housing and provides an inexpensive alternative to high-rise apartment buildings nearby.

"MIFFLAND" CULTURAL LANDSCAPE GROUP (downtown scale)

Hongyan Yang

Madison was surrounded by a network of lakes, marshes, streams and rivers, which is a visible marker of the region's glacial past. In 1885, Miffland was a ten-foot deep pond filled with muskrat houses. It was wetland with high water table. In early era, the development of West Mifflin Street is closely related to Landscape architect John Nolen and its location close to Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul& Pacific Railroad depot. In transition era, Miffland has turned into a predominantly student residential community due to its close to campus and the changed university housing policy. In current era, with its continuing domination by students, it was planned to develop as a relatively dense, urban mixed-use neighborhood for a variety of new business that growing out by University students and faculty.

Early Era: 1890-1910 Residential Space for working-class workers

Earlier development of this area was encouraged by Landscape architect John Nolen. In *Madison : a model city*, Nolen inaugurated a plan for the redemption and use of all marsh land within or near the limits of Madison. Mifflin was rapidly being filled and used for homes in the late 1890s. In addition, the early development of West Mifflin Street was also closely related to Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul& Pacific Railroad depot and rail yard that was shown at the end of the 600 block of West Mifflin Street. The railroad arrived in 1854, beginning with the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad, later known as the Milwaukee Railroad. During this period, between 1852 and 1855, the Wisconsin Commission of Emigration created by Madison promoter and Governor Leonard Farwell, actively encouraged the settlement of European immigrants. Since then, many Irish families who arrived earlier in the 1850s stayed in this area working for the railroad. At the same time, more immigrants poured into this area. Railroad also spurred the development of commercial warehouses in this area. Therefore, many two and three unit residences were built to house workers in this area. In addition, with its proximity to downtown, West Mifflin soon also became homes of workers who worked in downtown.

Transitional Era: 1935-1955 Residental Space for students arrived in 1960s

We expected the transition to happen during the post-war period, but it arrived later in the 1960s. The transition of this area as working class residential space to student rental area has a lot to deal with University housing policy in 1966. This change in housing policy permitted more students to live in private units. Because its proximity to campus area, this area has soon became dominated by students. Both the University and Downtown Madison have continued to grow around it. In 1970, Proposal for Central Madison was adopted to revitalize urban center that decayed due to suburbanization. Mifflin Street was planned as residential area. Later Mifflin Park Neighborhood Plan continued to strengthened its function as a predominantly student residential community. In 1989 Downtown Plan, Mifflin district was still maintained as residential area.

Current Era: 2000-present Mixed-use for new business

In downtown Advisory Report 2004, "West Mifflin Street was planned to provide a pleasing transition in scale and character to the adjoining and existing residential district." The existing building height limit along West Mifflin Street is three stories, and an additional two stories were allowed with four to five story height limits along this edge. Downtown plan that was adopted in 2012 provided a prospective development of downtown in the next twenty years. Mifflin district (west to Broom, east to Bedford), with its location as south to the expanded University campus, west to the Downtown employment core was planned to be recreated as a relatively dense, urban mixed-use neighborhood. Other than supporting University Campus and Downtown business, it was designed as a location for a variety of new business that growing out by University students and faculty.

Today, the Mifflin district is bounded on one side by the expanding UW campus and on the other by new, large scale developments extending west from the Downtown Core. South of West Washington Avenue, the Bassett Neighborhood has seen substantial redevelopment over the past 20 years. The changes of Mifflin Street are comparatively slow as housings here are based on small lots. It also has so many different property owners. Both make it hard to assemble properties and replace them others at a low price.

Rebecca Summer Cultural Landscape of W Mifflin—block scale

1880-1910

As downtown Madison began to expand in the 1880s, the 400 and 500 blocks of West Mifflin Street remained a swampy area unsuitable for construction. By 1895, businesses existed along the 0 and 100 blocks of W Mifflin (adjacent to the state capitol) and the railroad roundhouse stood past Bedford St, where the 600 block would have been, but these two blocks remained empty; the only structure in the area was the Strack and Plan(?) business (lumberyard?) on the 500 block of W Washington (the south side of the 500 W Mifflin square block). (1885 Sanborn) By the early 1890s, enough waste from the adjacent railroad yard had been dumped to fill in the swampy land, making W Mifflin finally fit for development. (MA Thesis) By 1892, at least a dozen wooden frame houses covered the 400 block. The 500 block began to see houses after 1895. (1892 Sanborn) Most of these homes were two stories high, with front gables and two "flats", or apartments, for two families. The blocks resembled railroad towns across the country, with narrow lots, and porches on the front façade. People who had seen the swampy marshland in the 1880s were shocked to see construction in the same place just a decade later. (MA Thesis—from Mollenhoff book) The period from 1895 to 1910 saw tremendous growth and construction on W Mifflin. A 1910 advertisement that states, "Flat on Mifflin for sale or trade. Will take vacant lot in return." indicates a lot of turnover on the street among residents but also among developers. (State Journal, 1910)

The blocks were oriented toward the railroad, and many of the residents were employees of the C.M. St. P&P Railroad or other businesses nearby. (*MA Thesis*) The proximity to the railroad, the presence of multiple families in one house, and the fact that both men and women residents worked (*Angela's research—city directories*) indicates that this was a primarily working-class neighborhood. However, there is indication that some wealthier early Madisonians lived there too. According to city directories, some families may have had live-in servants. (*Angela research*). Residents on West Mifflin street are listed in the Society Pages of the Wisconsin State Journal as early as 1901. In 1912, an announcement tells that sisters from W Mifflin street are traveling to New York to visit Niagara Falls. This is not an activity that working class sisters likely would have been able to afford. (*State Journal*, 1901, 1912)

1935-1955 (This is the time I know the least amount—should check with undergrad groups to determine family-to-student turnover date)

By the 1930s, the 400 and 500 blocks of W Mifflin were filled in with houses and tall leafy trees (indicated they had been planted around the time the houses were built at the turn of the century). (1930 and 1937 aerial photos). Sometime between 1908 and 1940, second-story porches were added to many of the houses. (MA Thesis) (Don't know the significance yet—could mean ppl wanted to be oriented to the street, or this could have been done in 1908 when became flats originally). In 1941, the north side of the 400 block of West Mifflin was paved, meaning the roads had become worn down or need to be repaired for vehicular traffic. (don't know if they were paved before) By the mid-1940s, houses and apartments on W Mifflin appeared frequently in the "For Sale" section of the Madison Wisconsin State Journal. In a single day in 1946, two houses and an apartment building were listed. (State Journal, March 4, 1946)

2000-present

West Mifflin Street of the 21st century is almost entirely a popular area for undergraduate student housing. As has been the case for the past forty years of so, the turn-of-the-century houses remain in various states of upkeep and disrepair, often owned by absentee landlords who offer an inexpensive alternative to upscale student apartments nearby. (1971 plan, talk with Bob Suddeth, Milwaukee Journal, 1987) Today, Badger and Green Bay football flags hang from second-story porches; many of the original second-story porches have been replaced with unpainted two-by-fours that do not fit the buildings' architectural style and do not comply with current building codes. Parking is a perpetual puzzle. Parking lots behind the houses fit in the original long narrow lots. The two apartment complexes that have been added to the street have parking accommodations that reflect the car culture of the times in which they were built; the complex from the 1970s has a parking lot next to the street and the one from the early 2000s has an underground lot. Today, there are few trees; the early 1900s trees that had grown tall in the 1930s have been cut down.

Despite the fact that these blocks contain some of the last remaining affordable housing options for undergraduates and have important historical and cultural significance for the city (primarily the counter culture and student protests of the late-1960s that led to the infamous "Mifflin St. Block Party), the City of Madison proposed in its 2012 Downtown Plan to demolish the existing housing stock and construct a series of 6-story, mixed use apartment and retail space buildings. Because the city desires urban density downtown and new development, and because the existing housing continues to deteriorate, the plan states that "maintaining the status quo for this area is not considered a realistic or desirable long-term solution." (*Downtown Plan, 2012*) The city would like "Miffland" to remain a distinctive neighborhood even without its distinctive built environment, but it has not indicated how this will be accomplished.

Sources: Sanborn map 1885, 1892. MA thesis. Madison WI State Journal: June 3, 1910, October 18, 1901, August 8, 1912. September 10, 1941. March 4, 1946 (city directories—Angela) 1971 plan, informal interview with Bob Suddeth (property manager whose family owns 20+ buildings on W Mifflin), Milwaukee Journal: 1987. Downtown Plan 2012.

502 West Mifflin Street (Small Scale) Angela Pratt

For each of these time periods, I have traced the building and occupants at 502 West Mifflin Street over the course of ten years. The Anton and Frances Metz House (its historical name) was built in 1895, the first on the 500 block of West Mifflin Street. Two bays wide and two and-a-half stories tall, it features a raised basement and vinyl siding. It is in the Queen Anne style, with cutaway bay windows, a wide cornice and pediments on the top story and over the front stairs, and a complex-type roof.

Early Era: 1890-1910

While the 400 block of West Mifflin Street was built up by the 1890s, the major building period for the 500 block was 1900-1910, which is visible when looking at the city directories and cross-checking them with Sanborn maps. In the 1894-5 directory, there is no 500 block. By the 1896-7 directory, 502 West Mifflin was built and occupied by the Metz family (see below). In 1898-9, there are three additional homes (520, 523 and 527). By 1902, there are twelve homes on the block, a building boom that continues through 1908.

In his master's thesis that proposed a Mifflin Street Historic District, Barry Gore analyzed the 1911 city directory to determine the cultural landscape of the 500 block of West Mifflin Street by the end of this era of rapid growth. He found several railroad workers, including a fireman, brakemen, a boiler maker, and a conductor, and several traveling salesmen whose work may have been facilitated by their proximity to the train. There were also residents affiliated with the Democratic Printing Company, including a printer, an engraver, and two linotype operators. University employees occupied two houses on the block, and there were a few students, though they were still living with their parents and not independently.

- 502 West Mifflin Street: City Directories 1896-1907
 - As indicated in the 1896-7 city directory, it was originally the home of Anton Metz, a plumber and gas fitter, and his wife Frances.
 - o In the 1898-9 directory, a third household member, Helena Post, may be a servant (though her occupation is not indicated)—she is listed next to the Metzs, rather than with an "o," "r" or "u" to indicate an apartment over, to the rear, or in the basement. She is also not listed with a "z," which denoted a co-occupant.
 - In 1900-1, Kate Heller, a cousin, moved in with the Metzs. In that same year, Herman J. Minch, the superintendent of Forest Hill Cemetery, and his wife Bertha E., a bookkeeper, moved into the space over the Metzs.
 - By 1902, the Metzs are gone and Marsh B. Fenner, who works in billiards and cigars, and his wife Mary had moved into the lower level. The Minches are still living in the flat above.
 - In 1904 the downstairs is occupied by Gertrude O'Connell, a clerk, and Grace O'Connell, a stenographer. The Minches are still upstairs, and Herman has taken a second position at a farm produce, flour, and feed warehouse.
 - In 1907 Minnie O'Connell (perhaps a nickname for Gertrude or Grace), widow of John Edward, who worked at the State Bank, is living downstairs. The Minches are still upstairs. The 1914 directory indicates the same configuration.

The turnover at 502 West Mifflin demonstrates that the homes from the very beginning were used as flats, similar to their current configuration. While the Metzs might have had servants in the home's early years, soon its upper and lower levels were occupied by different families.

Transitional Era: 1935-1955



502 West Mifflin in the mid-twentieth-century (Image from Wisconsin Historical Society's AHI database)

In comparing Sanborn maps from 1908 and 1942, it is visible that many homes on West Mifflin Street added a second story to their porches. Many of them are also labeled differently (as "flats" rather than "dwellings"), which indicates that they were multi-unit, rather than single-family homes. An additional way to track home ownership and a potential increase in renters is through the city directories, which indicate ownership with an "o" next to occupants' names. In 1939, thirteen out of forty-four properties on the 500 block of West Mifflin Street were indicated as "owned" by their occupants. In 1946 and 1947, it is fourteen and seventeen. In 1950 the number of owners jumps to twenty-one, though the properties also increase to forty-six. This increase in ownership could indicate that the transitional dates we picked are too early to reflect the turn to student housing. Or perhaps, unlike today, owners were more likely to live in the home (a kind of boardinghouse model) with their tenants.

- 502 West Mifflin: City Directories 1939-1950
 - The 1939 city directory indicates Ray A. Oelmiller, a plumber, and his wife Mary A. and Hans Anderson, a laborer, and his wife Gertrude E. as occupants.
 - The 1946 and 1947 directories show Hans and Gertrude Anderson still living here—it lists his company as Paley Brothers in 1946 and a cement finisher at Fred Aachen in 1947. It also lists as an occupant Anton Metz, the original builder of the home over fifty years before. His listing says, "Metz A & Son (Anton and Wm J Metz) Plumbers 502 W Mifflin, Tel Fairchild 660." Just below it says, "Anton (A Metz & Son) h427 W Mifflin."

This seems to indicate that the Metz's plumbing business was at least partly run out of this property, which they appear to have owned the whole time while living a block away at 427 West Mifflin. The directory also lists as an occupant Willis E. and Olive K. Steinhofer—he is indicated below (as perhaps a tenant of) the Metzs. Willis was a driver at the Standard Seed & Feed Company.

O By 1950, there appear to be three apartments in the home (indicated by three bells for telephone lines next to tenants' names). Mrs. Mabel L. Bennett occupies one and is indicated as "owner." Metteo Riolo, a helper at the university, and Walter Gartske, a painter, and his wife Kate, appear to share another. Riolo is listed in the same directory in Apartment #4 at 125 E Gorham, perhaps indicating a mid-year move such that he was recorded in both homes. Hans Anderson is still working as a laborer and living in the third apartment with his wife, Gertrude.

As in the period from 1897-1907, there is still considerable turnover at 502 West Mifflin. There is some indication that the unit is split in this time into smaller apartments. Throughout the early 20th century the original builders of the house, the Metzs, appear to have rented it while living a block away on West Mifflin. At times, they ran their plumbing business out of the house. There are also a couple of mid-1940s newspaper mentions of a welding company run out of 502 West Mifflin. By 1950, the Metzs had sold the home to Mabel Bennett, who continued to rent the units.

Our understanding of this era is significantly bolstered by articles in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. An August 21st, 1945 article about the death of a former employee in the *Wisconsin State Journal* confirms that the Metz's plumbing business was at least partly housed at 502 West Mifflin in the 1940s. Metz is mentioned in the paper throughout the early 20th century—apparently he installed the plumbing at many of the major commercial buildings throughout Madison during this time. He advertises himself as a "plumber to particular people." A 1942 article from the *Capital Times* further describes the Metz's plumbing business moving to 502.

The 1940s appears to have been a dark time in the history of 502 West Mifflin and, perhaps, the neighborhood. Hans Anderson, a resident described in the city directories above, was arrested for reckless driving in September 1943. A grim October 9th, 1949 article details an episode of domestic abuse in the home, perpetrated by Charles Denson, whose family left by the time the 1950 city directory is published. A 1950 property transfer describes that 502 West Mifflin, a "rooming house" owned by Mrs. Mabel Bennett, has been sold to "the Charles E. Meier folks." This suggests the home's ongoing function as a rental property, though through this point we see families rather than students as its occupants.

The 1940 Census also provides insight into 502 West Mifflin during this era. In 1940, 37 year-old Norwegian Hans Anderson, his wife Gertrude, and their three young children were living in the house. They are indicated as renters, along with the Elliot family, who do not appear in the 1939 or 1946 city directories. 41 year-old William Elliot, his wife Lela, and their nine children ages two to sixteen lived in the other unit. Elliot was occupied as a junior clerk at the "community surplus." Their neighbors included bookkeepers, musicians, carpenters, a truck driver, and an electrician.

Current Era: 2000-present



502 West Mifflin in the 2000s (image taken from Google Street View)

These days, a Google search finds 502 West Mifflin Street listed as a 2,523 square foot duplex with eight bedrooms and three bathrooms. While it is not currently up for rent, nearby 4-bedroom apartments at 441 West Mifflin Street are renting for \$2,010 per month (www.cdliving.com). A robbery was reported at the house on October 23rd, 2013 at 2:30 in the afternoon, one of a string of recent armed robberies in the downtown area (http://spotcrime.com/wi/madison/daily/2013-10-23; http://www.nbc15.com/home/headlines/Madison-Police-investigate-armed-robbery-on-W-Mifflin-St-228998681.html).

Ultimately, our best sense of the current usage of the home may come from our conversation with Bob Suddeth, a property manager on West Mifflin Street. For more on that, see Becca's write up.

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