

Welcome to Downtown Fond du Lac!

The City of Fond du Lac was nicknamed “Fountain City” for its many artesian wells. The first fountain erupted in 1849 when water was struck 85 feet below the surface at the corner of Main Street and Western Avenue. While the artesian wells are no longer evident, there are still many sights to see in downtown. Take some time to enjoy the rich history of the downtown through the buildings and architecture. Learn some interesting facts and tidbits about the people and places that made Fond du Lac the city it is today. As you tour the downtown make sure you take a moment to enjoy the people and businesses along the way — they’re making tomorrow’s history today!

1) Civil War Monument (Veterans Park)



For almost 110 years, this locally designated tin statue has welcomed visitors to Veteran’s Park. Fond du Lac county is believed to have had more volunteers in the Civil War than any other county in the state. The statue is 35 ft. tall, weighs 8 tons and leans 7 inches from vertical at the top. Monuments of the era were often made of stone, but metal was gaining popularity for its affordable price and appealing durability. Local leaders expected a solid brass statue, and were disappointed when it turned out to be hollow tin. In the late 1980’s, the statue was tilting and repairs to the foundation were needed. No one minded the maintenance, but an outcry arose when the statue was turned. It had always faced east per military protocols, but trees had grown up around the monument, blocking its view. The trees could not be moved

since they commemorate local heroes so city leaders opted for turning the statue so more people could see it.

Veterans Park was the site of the old County Courthouse. The Courthouse was razed when the City/County building was constructed across the street.

As you leave Veteran’s Park, head north on South Macy Street until you reach First Street.



14) Retlaw Theater (23 S. Main Street)

Walter Schroeder, owner of the Hotel Retlaw, did not want to be outdone by Chicago theater owner, Frank Fischer. On December 26, 1925, approximately one month after Fischer’s theater, Schroeder opened the Retlaw Theater. While smaller than the Fischer Theater, the Art Deco style Retlaw housed not only the largest one-floor theater in Wisconsin at the time, but also a glassed-in roof garden that was the only one of its kind outside of Milwaukee. The theater has seating for 1,100 people and *Classified* was the first movie shown. The Retlaw stopped showing movies in September 1998, the

same year it was designated a local landmark, and one of the last movies screened at the theater was *Titanic*.

15) The Woolworth Building (74 S. Main Street)



This three-story 20th century Commercial style can easily be identified with the large metal sign above the windows identifying it as the F.W. Woolworth Building. This building was probably constructed for the store operated by J.C. Whittelsey who began operating a dry goods business until 1907. The building was then combined with its neighbor to the south to make up the large Woolworth’s Dime store.

16) Commercial National Bank (91 S. Main Street)



This Richardsonian Romanesque building was constructed in 1903 and is part of the South Main Street Historic District. Its massive quality is achieved by using rusticated brownstone. The Commercial National Bank occupied this building until 1923. Between 1924 and the 1970s, the building housed a café and professional offices. At one time it was known as the Lion Café, named for the two stonecarved lion heads flanking the entrance of the building.



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11) Hotel Retlaw (1 N. Main Street)

This locally and nationally designated landmark was built in 1923 by Walter Schroder. The name Retlaw came from spelling his first name, Walter, backwards. The hotel stands eight stories tall and towers over other buildings in the downtown. You might be surprised to learn that the Hotel Retlaw has been the lodging of choice for several famous people over the years including Eleanor Roosevelt, Jack Dempsey, Gene Autry, Paul Newman and John and Jackie Kennedy.

Go east on Sheboygan Street one block to Portland Street. Go north on Portland Street to your next destination.



12) Trinity Church (40 E. Division Street)

This church was organized in 1911 to provide English speaking Lutherans with their own congregation since St. Peter's was predominantly a German church. In 1920, the Trinity English Lutheran Church merged with Immanuel German Lutheran Church that would lead to the construction of this Neo-Gothic Revival church in 1930. The congregation made efforts to utilize local materials, including limestone from a quarry outside the city and local artisans that crafted the interior wood carving. More than 90% of the building was completed by

local labor. In 2002, the congregation voted in favor of building a new church at a new site. A local developer, Commonwealth Development, purchased the property for a restaurant and banquet hall with an eye toward maintaining the exterior and interior architectural details.

Return to Sheboygan Street and go east to the center of this block for your next two destinations.

13) Wisconsin Telephone Building (45 Sheboygan Street)



This Classical Revival building was designed by Milwaukee architect Alexander Eschweiler for the Wisconsin Telephone Company. The building details more commonly found in Classical Revival architecture were scaled down to decorate this more simple building. The building represents a significant part of the city's history because of the telephone, one of the most important utilities. It is believed that the first telephone was installed at a local drug store in 1879. By the end of 1879, 25 telephones were in operation. Due to the rapidly increasing number of telephone subscribers, the

company constructed the front of the building in 1912 and a rear addition in 1923. Offices of the Wisconsin Telephone Company were housed here through 1955. While not designated, the building is eligible for the National Register due to its connection to the Wisconsin Telephone Company.

Go west on Sheboygan Street to return to Main Street. Turn left/south onto Main Street to reach your next stop.

2) Macy Street

Macy Street was named for John B. Macy who owned a lot of land in the center of the city. Macy came to Fond du Lac at the urging of Eastern bankers who were interested in development opportunities of the west. In 1850, Macy started construction of the Rock River Valley Union Railroad which started in Fond du Lac and extended south to Janesville, following the Rock River, where it joined another rail line from Chicago. This was the start of the Chicago & Northwestern rail system.

3) First Baptist Church (90 S. Macy Street)



This locally and nationally designated structure is an example of early 20th century Neo-Gothic design. The building incorporates the coloration and proportion of Craftsman design with the ornamental and structural features of Gothic tradition. The First Baptist Church of Fond du Lac was organized in 1845 and joined with the People's Church, an unaffiliated body, in 1905. With the increase in members, the congregation needed

to construct a new building. By the 1930's, the First Baptist Church was one of the most active congregations in the city. They moved to a smaller structure in 1980.

Head north on Macy Street towards Forest Avenue.

4) Forest Avenue

It is said that the Avenue was named for the 23 sawmill operators that lived on this street. However, Forest Avenue was also known for the wooded areas that lined both sides. Forest Avenue between Brooke and Seymour was paved with concrete in 1908 becoming the first concrete pavement in the State and one of the first in the nation. In 1835, the bridge across the East Branch of the Fond du Lac was constructed when the army was building Military Road. This bridge preceded all other bridges in this part of the State. Military Road was the first road to cross Fond du Lac County and was part of a larger road project. Troops from various forts throughout the state constructed the road in sections. Troops from Ft. Winnebago extended the road from Portage to Fond du Lac and troops from Ft. Howard extended the road from Fond du Lac to Green Bay. On your way out of town, stop at the historical marker on Military Road to learn more.

Continue to head north on Macy Street to Division Street. Turn left onto Division Street and cross the river to get to your next destination.

5) Cathedral Church of St. Paul (51 W. Division Street)



On September 3, 1848, St. Paul's Church was formally organized by Rev. Joshua Sweet. The expanding congregation moved to its current location in 1866. In 1875, with the formation of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, St. Paul's Church became Cathedral Church of St. Paul the Apostle and the seat of the first bishop, John Henry Hobart Brown of New York. The first building was destroyed by fire in 1884 and rebuilt with the present Gothic-Revival church constructed between 1885–1887. The church interior is decorated with many outstanding examples of ecclesiastical art, but the most significant is the front of the St. Augustine chapel altar. It is an exquisite piece of color-infused marble, an example of the Endolithic process.

The windows in the chapel, completed in 1966, show a use of stained glass different from other windows.

Head east on Division Street, across the river and past Macy Street until you reach Main Street. Cross Main Street until you are on the east side of the street. You will be looking at buildings on the west side of the street.



6) Finnegan's (2 N. Main Street)

This locally designated landmark was built in 1867 as the Bank of Fond du Lac. After the bank failed and it was turned into a saloon, Schmidt's Sample Room. The site is well known for Carrie Nation's ax-wielding attack in 1902 after a rousing lecture on the evils of tobacco and liquor. The building is also famous for the

underground tunnels which connected the bar to the Hotel Retlaw and Dillingers Bar.

Head north on Main Street.

7) German American Savings Bank (28. N. Main Street)

The building, part of the North Main Street Historic District, was built in 1873 to house the newly incorporated German American Savings Bank which catered to the city's German speaking population. The building is constructed of brick and stone with an Italianate style façade. The building originally had a brownstone front with ornamentation including cornice trim, lintel trim and corbels. Rudolph Ebert, born in Germany, served as Bank President and locally well known investors included Frederick Rueping, William Rueping, Louis Muentner, J.C. Perry, Alexander McDonald and Franz Lauenstein. Ebert built the home known locally as "The Pink Lady," located at 199 E. Division Street as his family home and a local historic site.

The first floor was renovated in 2008 and the historic renovation of the exterior of the building, including extensive restoration of the original masonry work, earned owner Sam Meyer the 2008 DFP Design of the Year award.

Head north on Main Street to Merrill Avenue.

8) Merrill Avenue

Merrill Avenue marks the southern edge of the Original Plat. The avenue is named after Captain Moses E. Merrill, one of the stockholders in the land company.

At Merrill Avenue, cross to the west side of Main Street. Head south on Main Street to your next destination. You will be looking at buildings on the east side of Main Street.

9) Fischer's Fond du Lac Theatre (27 N. Main Street)



The theater, part of the North Main Street Historic District, was considered the City's first movie palace, built by Fischer Theater Company (Fischer-Paramount Theaters) in the Beaux Arts style of the time, featuring ornate terra cotta decoration on the exterior. The theater opened on November 25, 1925, and its total cost is estimated at \$750,000; the equivalent of well over \$8 million in today's costs. This type of architecture was not typically seen in a downtown environment. The theater's capacity seating was 2000 and also featured a \$40,000 Barton organ, a full orchestra pit, a state-of-the-art ventilation system and an electric sign on the front of the building which was the largest in the state at that time.

Opening day movies included *The Ten Commandments* and *The Covered Wagon*. The opening was preceded by a parade down Main Street featuring Miss Paramount, Miss Fond du Lac and many other dignitaries.

Everything in the theater was considered state-of-the art for its time, including the HVAC system that was capable of an early form of air-conditioning during hot summer months. Air was pulled through cooling chambers located in the basement where air was filtered, sterilized and cooled to 60 degrees. By the time it reached the theater, it was a comfortable 65 degrees. Sadly, the theater closed in the mid-1980's after deterioration of the plaster walls caused by the primitive air-conditioning system made repairs far too costly. Although the theater itself is gone, the surrounding building which housed the lobby still remains.

10) Wisconsin Power & Light Company (15 N. Main Street)



This three-story Italianate style commercial building was constructed in 1874 and is part of the North Main Street Historic District. The building was occupied by the Wisconsin Power & Light Company in 1910 and was named the Public Service Building. The company was involved in the operation of the old interurban and local street car lines. In 1925, the Company began phasing out the interurban services and promoting bus service. At that time, part of the building's storefront

was remodeled and connected to the building to the north with a large brick arch that led to the bus depot. The single-story building to the north was used as the bus depot waiting room. The Company stayed in this building well into the 1960s.