

A Look Back in Time

The old Elk's Club, also known as The Heritage House, is located at 5706 8th Ave, was built in 1916, the cornerstone laid in 1917 and the building was occupied in January of 1919.

Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. It was determined that The Elk's Club is architecturally significant under Standard 1, "Exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural, social, economic, political, engineering and/or architectural history". Standard 3, "Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship". And Standard 4, "Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced their age"



The old Elk's Club is a four-story building constructed of red brick in the Classical Revival architectural style. The main block of the building has a rectangular plan and there is a one-story rectangular ell that projects off of the west wall. The main block of the building features a flat roof with a plain parapet defined by a narrow stone cornice. A larger stone cornice defines the fourth story and wraps around the projecting portico. Other stone belt courses decorate the building and a stone water table decorates the foundation. The brickwork is coursed to mimic stonework. The same effect is used at the corners, suggesting quoins.

Dominating the main elevation is a colossal two-story portico that has a flat roof and is supported by colossal stone columns in the Tuscan Order. The portico has a brick platform supported by heavy brick piers. Recessed behind the Tuscan columns is a set of two-story, multi-light, tripartite openings topped with large fanlights that are decorated with brick arches and surrounds. Behind the brick piers are the main entrances that are enclosed with modern metal and glass doors with modern sidelights and transoms. Window openings between the entrances are multi-light, double-hung sashes and similar multi-light sashes punctuate the other walls of the building, either individually or in groups. Some of these windows are decorated with brick jack arches and keystones. Very large brick jack arches, two with massive keystones, decorate the openings between the piers on the first story of the portico.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks #750 was chartered in 1902 and initially met in a lodge room in downtown Kenosha. In 1916, the club members hired Milwaukee architect Robert E. Messmer to design a new clubhouse. The site for the new building was the old Pettit Malt House, which had burned in 1914. In the fall of 1916, the Immel Construction Company began clearing the site and constructing the new building. The cornerstone was laid in June of 1917, and the building was occupied in January of 1919. The new building included several dining rooms, bars, a swimming pool, a pool room, and a lodge hall. It was considered a showplace in the city.

The local Elks Club was formed primarily for fraternal reasons based on the national Elks principles of virtue, patriotism and fellowship. In the later twentieth century, the Elks Club has concentrated on more philanthropic activities, supporting local and national causes. In 1977, the Elks remodeled their clubhouse and at that time, had a thriving banquet and party business and 850 members. But, at the same time, fraternal organizations were declining, and by the late 1980s, the Elks were in financial trouble. After filing for bankruptcy, the organization closed the club in January of 1990. Heritage House is currently looking for new life.

