

## HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

### PRYOR AVENUE IRON WELL

(Written Spring, 1987)

#### I. NAME

Historic: Pryor Avenue Iron Well

Common: Same

#### II. LOCATION

1710 East Pryor Avenue

Legal Property Description: In the public right-of-way on the north side of East Pryor Avenue between South Wentworth and South Superior streets in the city of Milwaukee.

#### III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

#### IV. OWNER

Henry J. Balconi, Superintendent  
City of Milwaukee, Water Department  
841 North Broadway, Room 402  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

#### V. YEAR BUILT

1882; c. 1920's

#### VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Pryor Avenue Iron Well is located in the brick paved parkway between the sidewalk and the curb in front of 1710 East Pryor Avenue. It is sited in a nineteenth century working class residential area of small, frame, Victorian houses.

The Iron Well consists of a 20-inch square exposed aggregate concrete monolith with a moulded cap. A pipe spews water into ground level basins on the east and west sides, while a drinking fountain basin projects from the north side about halfway up the approximately five-foot tall shaft. A wooden access panel on the south side conceals the plumbing located inside the wellhead. All but the north side has been covered with cement plaster in recent years.

#### VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Pryor Avenue Iron Well is historically significant as the last surviving example of the public wells that once provided drinking water in modest neighborhoods such as Bay View. It is important as a still functioning reminder of a now vanished type of public utility that was

indispensable in the years before all of the houses in Bay View were provided with running water.

### **VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This artesian well was begun in 1882 as a public works project to provide a source of safe drinking water and fire protection for the Bay View neighborhood. Drilling began in October, but proceeded slowly due to the difficulty of penetrating the glacial drift. By early December, the well was only 500 feet deep, after which the drilling proceeded at a more rapid rate. By January 6, 1883 pipes had been drilled to a depth of 1275 feet and soon thereafter reached the final depth of 1500 feet. At this point the water was under sufficient natural pressure that it provided a constant supply of pure water to this mother well as well as to a system of satellite wells and fire hydrants throughout the area serviced by a system of pipes radiating out from it under the streets. The system was essentially complete by 1888.

The original well was reportedly little more than an exposed run of pipe with spigots at which residents could fill their water containers. By the 1920s, the present concrete monolith had been built. By this time, all of the houses in Bay View had been hooked up to the city water system, but the well has remained popular because of the excellent taste of the spring water. The well, with the familiar line of people drawing water, has become a popular landmark. In 1980 the importance of the structure as a local landmark was recognized by a Common Council resolution. A brass plaque on the well commemorates that act.

### **IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Pryor Avenue Iron Well be designated a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria one and nine of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 2-335(2)(e).

### **X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES**

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the Pryor Avenue Iron Well. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

#### **A. Materials**

1. Unpainted exposed aggregate concrete should not be painted or covered with other materials.
2. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with other materials.
3. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the well was constructed. If restoration is contemplated, consider removing the smooth concrete finish and restoring the original finish.

B. Form

Retain the present shape. If rebuilding is required, rebuild to duplicate the present configuration.

C. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the well and the Bay View Historic District.

D. Site Features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the architectural character of the Bay View Historic District.

Source: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission

# Historic Site Designation Application

## 1. Name

Historic: Pryor Avenue Iron Well (as per resolution 1987 MAY -01 11:11 AM '88)  
and/or Common: passed by Milw. Common Council March 13 1980

## 2. Location

Street & number: E. Pryor Avenue in front of #1710  
Alderman: Daniel Ziolkowski  
District (s): 14

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Present use			
<input type="checkbox"/> building (s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> park	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> cemetery	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> other
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> religious	<input type="checkbox"/> military	
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> private-residence	<input type="checkbox"/> museum	<u>public</u>

## 4. Owner of Property

Name: City of Milwaukee c/o Henry J. Balconi: Supt. Water Works  
Street & number: 841 N. Broadway, Rm 402  
City: Milw. State: WI Zip: 53201

## 5. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory: National Register Historic Places: Bay View Historic District - listed as a contributing significant property  
Date: 1979  federal  state  county  local

Depository for survey records:

Organization: State Historical Soc. of Wisconsin  
Street & number: 816 State Street  
City: Madison State: WI

Previous historic designation:

National Register; date 1979 Name: Bay View Historic District

City of Milwaukee Landmark; date \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

name of program: \_\_\_\_\_ date designated: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Description

Condition:	Check one	Building form:	gable (flank___; end___; cross___) gambrel (flank___; end___; cross___) hip___ mansard___ flat___ other _____
___ excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	Stories: _____	Roof:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	___ moved date	Foundation:	stone___; brick___; concrete block___; concrete <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ; other _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	___ altered		
___ deteriorated	___ unaltered		
___ ruins			

Walls:

clapboard\_\_\_; brick\_\_\_; stucco\_\_\_; stone\_\_\_; wood shingle\_\_\_; slate\_\_\_; terra cotta\_\_\_;  
asphalt siding\_\_\_; asbestos tile\_\_\_; aluminum siding\_\_\_; artificial stone\_\_\_; other \_\_\_\_\_

Written description: (Continue on a separate sheet, if necessary)

The fountain structure is composed of cast reinforced exposed aggregate concrete. The cap as well as the north elevation, which contains the drinking fountain, preserve this buff stone patina. At the east and west elevations, spigots are provided to fill water containers. Cement plaster has been added to all but the north elevation obscuring the original finish. The south elevation contains a large door for maintaining the plumbing as well as a plaque reading "Dedicated by the Bay View Historical Society 1980."

The ground surrounding the structure is surfaced with red brick pavers installed by the Bay View Historical Soc. in 1980.

This is the last remaining public well-structure in the city.

(Continued on next sheet)

# 7. Significance

Areas of significance:

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture        | <input type="checkbox"/> economics              | <input type="checkbox"/> law                 | <input type="checkbox"/> science             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> architecture       | <input type="checkbox"/> education              | <input type="checkbox"/> literature          | <input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> art                | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> military            | <input type="checkbox"/> theater             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> commerce           | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> music               | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communications     | <input type="checkbox"/> industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy          | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <u>community</u>                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conservation       | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion            | <u>water supply</u>                          |

Date built or altered: 1920-

Builder/architect: City of Milw.

Written statement of significance: (Continue on a separate sheet, if necessary)

This artesian well was planned in 1882 as a local community water supply and to include fire protection. Drilling started in October 1882 although progress was slow due to glacial drift - only reaching 300' by Dec 4<sup>th</sup> 1882. However by Jan 6<sup>th</sup> 1883 the well was drilled to 1275 feet and flowing under its own pressure (final depth 1500') This water under its own pressure was distributed in pipes below the streets to other "bubblers" and fountains in the Bay View Area in 1888.

After the installation of City water supplies this well continued and continues today as a source of refreshing spring water to the Bay View community as well as the city.

## 8. Major Bibliographical References

- ① *Heritage Guidebook Landmarks & Historical sites in Southeastern Wisconsin*, H. Russell Zimmermann 1976
- ② *Milwaukee Sentinel*
  - 23 Sept 1882 2/3
  - 24 Oct. 1882 2/1
  - 4 Dec. 1882 2/4
  - 6 Jan 1883

## 9. Property Description

Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal property description:

*E. Pryor Avenue, Milw.*

*located between sidewalk & curb in city right of way and adjacent to the south line of Lot 3, Block 3, William J. Pryor's Addition to the Village of Bay View.*

## 10. Form Prepared By

Name/title: *John C. Ebersol, Chair Landmarks Committee, Bay View Historical Soc.*  
Organization: *Bay View Historical Society Box 07614 Zip 53207* Date *7 May 1987*  
Street & number: *2581 So. Shore Drive, 53207* Telephone *744 5381*  
City: *Milwaukee* State: *WI* Zip: *53207*

Return to: Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission • Department of City Development • P.O. Box 324 • 734 N. 9th Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201 • (414) 278-9791

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278-5705

503 N. Park St.