

West Broadway Revitalization Project Update

Fall, 2006



Restoration of the historic Borden Building site began in November 2005, when voters approved the sale of City Hall with the proceeds to be used to help pay for its renovation. As the West Broadway Revitalization Project progresses, residents will see the Borden Building adaptively reused to house City offices and other commercial uses. [Connections](#) and the City's website will be used to keep all residents informed of progress as it becomes known.

Appreciate its Past; Anticipate its Future

As history turns a corner at the old Borden Building, and as renovations are about to take place, now is a good time to reflect on the history behind its origin and the people whose visions became reality.

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, agriculture was the primary occupation in the Mt. Pleasant area. In 1900, when Isabella County's population stood at 22,704, the Michigan Department of Agriculture statistics indicated the county had 5,436 farms averaging 73.9 acres in size. The dairy cattle "census" was 7,426 head, while milk production measured over four million gallons per year.

Although Mt. Pleasant was located along a major railroad, its distance from major population centers hindered the growth of the area's agriculture. To counter the lack of a large market for dairy products, yet continue the rate of milk

**Gail Borden
(1801-1874)
received a patent
in 1836 for "the
concentration of
milk" which
could preserve
the product
through the
condensing
process for
warehouse and
shelf storage.**

production on their farms, local dairy farmers proposed the establishment of a condensed milk plant to process, preserve and warehouse their milk product.

Attorney, businessman and politician Samuel Whaley Hopkins (1845-1923) was instrumental in successfully bringing a needed milk plant to Mt. Pleasant. Records show

that in October of 1907, after a year of negotiations, the Borden Condensed Milk Company of New York agreed to build a plant in Mt. Pleasant and formed a subsidiary. It was named the Michigan Condensed Milk Company.



In November of 1907, William D. Kyser, an architectural supervisor at Borden's Fairport, New York factory, came to Mt. Pleasant to lay out the project. D.C. Babcock, who had built the Fairport facility, was the

contractor. Construction of the Mt. Pleasant factory began in November of 1907 and was completed in May of 1908; a mere six months later. The dedication ceremony was attended by 2,500 people and included a full eight-piece orchestra.

The structure is a partial one- and two-story Commercial Italianate building, 270 feet long by 70 feet wide. The wall height of the upper floor is 30 feet with an open ceiling area above. The simple red exterior brick was fired in Boyne City. Triple rows of header brick create a decorative arch above each rounded window – over 200 of them in all.



The building's long, gable styled roof is by far its most distinctive and decorative feature. Eight



cupolas highlight the ridge line of the roof with their paired ventilation windows, designed to both provide light and release heat

from the boilers. The architecture of the cupolas is referred to in historic documents as “witches cap” roofs with brass knobbed finials (the decorative piece at the tip of the cupola).

Inside the plant are two levels of large open space, originally supported with huge timber beams and brick pillars. Some of the concrete floors were covered with hardwood which remains today. The 18-inch thick walls were constructed of three layers of brick. The purpose of the brick was to keep the building cool, similar to a cellar, since there was no refrigeration technology at that time. The interior brick is white, appropriate for a milk processing operation needing sanitary conditions and a cool environment for product storage.

The attached brick chimney standing 125 feet in height is highlighted by polychrome brickwork at its cap. Unfortunately, the structural integrity of the chimney has failed, forcing it to be taken down.

The Borden Condensed Milk Company took over the plant from the Michigan Condensed Milk Company in 1919 and the factory operation continued until 1960. From 1965 into the early

80's, the building was altered to serve both warehouse and retail office functions, primarily as the Bader seed and fertilizer mill.

In recognition of the Borden Building's contribution to Mt. Pleasant's history and its unique architectural design, the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Containing nearly 79,000 listings, the national register is the nation's official list of historic resources that are significant in American history, having been evaluated according to uniform standards and worthy of preserving.

It has taken forty years to find a suitable reuse of this unique building and the resources to renovate it. A new chapter of history is about to unfold as the building becomes productive once again, housing City Hall operations. Envision cars parked in the lot, people coming and going, landscaping along the last stretch of downtown, new residents viewing the river from their condos next door or walking downtown to shop and eat. Think of the big picture with anticipation as West Broadway Street becomes fully developed and financially productive, completing the last corridor of downtown Mt. Pleasant.

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