

Schnick, Andrea

From: Milliken, Trent
Sent: Friday, October 4, 2019 1:18 PM
To: Schnick, Andrea
Cc: Gilman, Jason
Subject: RE: 621 3rd St N - Tax Parcels: 17-20009-40
Attachments: La Crosse aerial - 1962 - Transit Center and NSP (003).jpg; 1954 Newspaper Scan.pdf; Sanborn Map - 1954.jpg

Andrea,

I went to the La Crosse Library Archives this morning and worked with Jenny DeRocher to get more information on the history of this property. She told me that Anita Doering has been looking into the history of the transit company and will get back to me with any more information that she finds on it in the future. This is what we gathered from going through the archives:

Construction on the building began in 1919 and was completed in 1920. It was originally owned by Wisconsin Railway Light & Power, who used it as a transformer station for the La Crosse electric streetcar system. (There used to be a cable tower on the north side of the building – seen in the Sanborn Map I attached) In 1926, Wisconsin Railway Light & Power changed its name to Mississippi Valley Public Service Co., but still owned and operated out of the building. The streetcars started losing popularity toward the end of the 1920s, and in 1929 the first buses were used for city transit. Streetcars became obsolete through the next decade and the last of them operated in the city 1945, changing completely to buses for city transit. In 1949, the property was bought by La Crosse Transit Co., owned by Ray M. Fey and his sons, Frederick L. Fey and Ray M. Fey, Jr. (I included a scan of the article from 1954 that shows all of that information) It remained a bus line owned by La Crosse Transit Co. until 1975, when the City of La Crosse purchased it and operated the La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility Bus Line out of it. The city operated here for two years and there are some holes in the chronology here, with the records saying that the building was vacant in 1977 and then in 1978, Northern States Power owned the building and was used as a sub-office. (at this point, the address was changed to 621) It was sold to Mississippi Welders Supply in 1982, which is who still owns the property today.

The archive librarian that I worked with sent me an aerial photo of the downtown from 1962 as well, which shows the massive fuel tank behind the building from when the transit line was in operation.

I'll keep looking into the history and keep you posted, but I thought this was an interesting start!

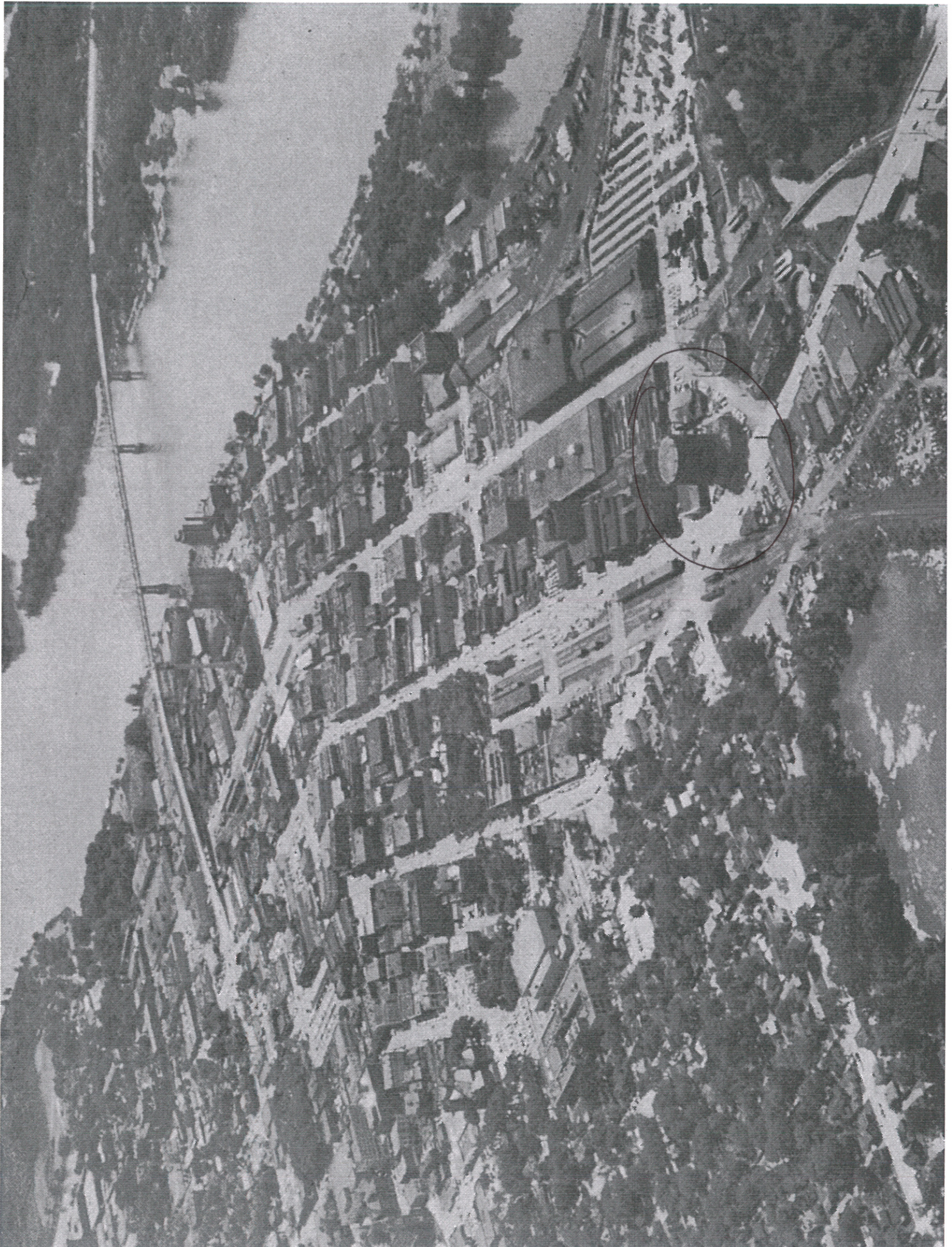
Thanks,
Trent

From: Milliken, Trent
Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2019 11:07 AM
To: Schnick, Andrea <schnicka@cityoflacrosse.org>
Subject: RE: 621 3rd St N - Tax Parcels: 17-20009-40

Hi Andrea,

I found that the building was originally built in 1920, but I can't find much else about the history of it, i.e. its original purpose, specific zoning history, or original owner. The only additional information that I could find on it is that its historic use was retail. (I found some of that info [here](#).)

Thanks,



Forerunners Of City Buses

Passengers warmed their feet in straw and kerosene lanterns hung at opposite ends of two 15-foot long La Crosse State Railway Co. cars pulled by horses on the Causeway 76 years ago.

That was the beginning of the present La Crosse Transit Co., which has 31 big buses in which passengers can travel to all sections of the city in motor-driven, heated comfort.

The old horse car drivers stood outside the closed passenger section and handled the reins in all kinds of weather. Today, the bus driver is inside and warm—and, above all else during rush hours, is assured of a seat at all times.

With an original capitalization of \$50,000, the La Crosse Street Railway Co. was started in 1879 by G. C. Prentiss, M. P. Wing, P. C. Davidson and David Law.

Route of the first street car line was from 3rd and Main streets north on the Causeway up to what was known as the "Bill Mill" in North La Crosse. The entire length of this line was 1.6 miles.

In June, 1881, a second company, known as the City Street Railway Co. started a horse-car line from 2nd and Vine streets to the "Shooting Park," a short distance southeast of the old John Gund Brewing Co. office on South avenue.

This second line extended 2.6 miles. It ran south on 2nd street to Pearl street, east on Pearl to 4th street, south on 4th to Cass street, east on Cass to 5th street, south on 5th to Market street, east on Market to 7th street and then south on 7th street to Mormon Cooks Road (South Avenue) to the "Shooting Park."

The City Street Railway Co. was organized by B. E. Edwards, George F. Gund, Mills Tostellette, Mons Anderson, James Vincent, Fred Tillman and Joseph Tutour. Vincent was president and Tostellette first secretary of the company.

In 1885, the La Crosse Street Railway Co. extended its line on the North Side to the McDonald Mill at Gohrs and George streets.

That same year, the two companies combined and formed the



W. Cecil Gordon (center), general manager of the La Crosse Transit Co., himself a veteran of city transportation service, is proud of the company's two oldest employees, Albert F. French, left,

and Martin J. Meyers are bus drivers who started work on electric street cars more than 30 years ago. The transit company celebrates 76 years in the city in 1954.

La Crosse City Railway Co. B. E. Edwards was made president of the new company and Harry West was secretary.

Stockholders of the La Crosse City Railway Co. in 1905 were W. W. Cargill, M. Funk, James Vincent, G. VanSteenwijk, B. E. Edwards, Henry Gund, L. T. Easton, F. P. Hixon and Frank Tillman.

Peter Valier, who had been superintendent of the North Side lines, and George Smith, superintendent of the South Side tracks, were retained in those positions.

The City Railway Co. continued to operate horse cars until 1890, when the cars in La Crosse were electrified.

In 1913, the Wisconsin Light and Power Co. purchased the La Crosse lines. Clement C. Smith was president of the light and power company which continued operation of the street cars and changed its name to the Mississippi Valley Public Service Co. in 1926.

First buses appeared on city streets in 1929, when the La Crosse street end of the street-car lines

was abandoned and replaced by a 21-passenger motor driven vehicle.

Other street car lines changed over to bus service in 1937 and 1938. In November 1945, the North Side car line became the last in the city to switch to buses. Old car barns at 801 N. 3rd St. were then remodeled to house the gasoline equipment.

In 1948, Ray M. Fey and his sons, Frederick L. Fey and Ray M. Fey Jr., joined Andrew G. Anderson in purchasing the bus lines from the Mississippi Valley Public Service Co. Three years later, Anderson sold his interest in the business to the Feys.

Today, Ray M. Fey heads the La Crosse Transit Co. as president and W. Cecil Gordon is general manager of the bus lines.

Gordon first worked as a storekeeper for the transit company here in 1929. He went to Winona, Minn., as superintendent of that city's transportation lines in 1933. In July 1953, Gordon returned to La Crosse as general manager of bus lines.

Two of the transit company's veteran employees are Albert F. French, with 24 years of service, and Martin J. Meyers, 35 years. Both started work on the electric street cars, alternating as motorman and conductor jobs.

Now, French and Meyers drive buses—have since 1945—and like their work better than in the street car days.

"I'd do the same thing, if I had to start over," Meyers described his career with the company. He agreed with French that working conditions improved with the change to buses. "There is a lot of difference riding on rubber and not steel," French explained.

Passengers today are not much changed from those 30 years ago, the oldtime drivers thought. They explained that there is always "a certain amount of give and take" in the work.

No longer a part of the present-day drivers' experiences with passengers is the story told some years back by one of the old horse-car drivers. He explained that "sometimes the horse cars were kept out all night for special parties, or weddings, and when this happened the drivers were taken into the house and wine and dined with the guests, and in the morning were sent home with a couple dollars for a tip."

Today, a hurried greeting or di-

—Tribune Photo

section: "Watch your step. Move to the back of the bus, please. Take the next bus, please"—is the only exchange between driver and passenger.