

C.A. Lawton

PUB-RR-743

October, 2005

C.A. Lawton

233 North Broadway
De Pere, WI
Brown County

Location: Downtown De Pere

How does a building go from being slated for demolition to being listed on the National Register of Historic Places? With the help of a determined community, a progressive city, and a "Big Picture" thinking developer.

History

The C.A. Lawton Company, located in downtown De Pere, opened its doors in 1891 to expand its ductile and iron foundry operations. Lawton operated as a foundry until 1971, when the building was used as office space through 1990.

In 1980, the city of De Pere established a tax incremental financing (TIF) district - a financial tool used by communities for public projects that will help stimulate development - that included the C.A. Lawton property. However, before a developer could be sought, environmental contamination on the property had to be assessed.

During its century of operation, C.A. Lawton ultimately expanded to occupy an entire city block. Through its expansion, the company



Erection of C.A. Lawton Foundry, 1891
(Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Main Street Association).

acquired property that once housed a gas station from 1927 through 1976.

Investigation & Cleanup

Investigators found that, at varying times during the existence of the company, there were eight underground oil and/or gasoline fuel tanks with capacities anywhere between 1,000-8,000 gallons on the property. An environmental assessment confirmed contamination at the site as a result of leaking from the underground storage tanks.

Chemical analysis also identified soils contaminated with petroleum-related compounds such as xylene and toluene.

With the help of funds from the state Petroleum Environmental Cleanup Fund Award (PECFA) program, contaminated soils and tanks were removed and the site was capped with asphalt to allow remaining soils to degrade using natural attenuation.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Remediation and Redevelopment Program

PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707
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Inside, remaining foundry contaminants were power washed and properly disposed of to mitigate any human health concerns. Once remediation was complete on both the inside and outside of the property, the DNR closed the site and gave the city a "thumbs up" for redevelopment.

Redevelopment

While the Lawton site enticed nearly a dozen developers, most proposals involved razing the deteriorating Lawton building and erecting a new structure. In 1992, the former Lawton complex was slated to be demolished, but the De Pere Main Street Association implored city officials to wait a few more months, in hopes of locating an 11th hour developer.

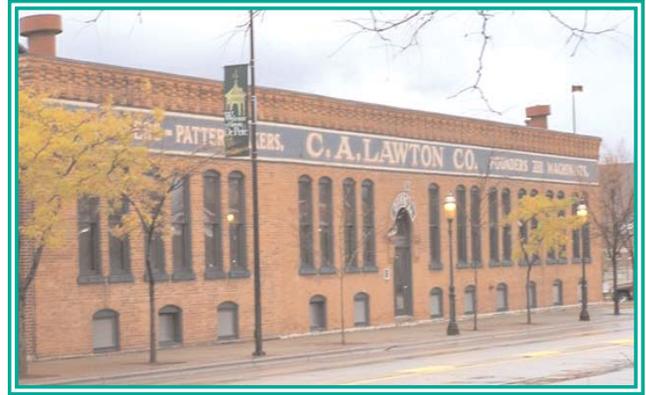
Enter the Madison-based Alexander Group. The company wanted to preserve the historical character of the area by utilizing the existing structure as a housing complex. Thanks to this effort, local officials changed their minds and opted not to demolish the site.

After extensive renovation, the building was turned into the Lawton Foundry Town Homes, containing 70 rental units with 660 to 1,800 square feet of space available in townhouse or flats.

The end result? The estimated \$5.5 million dollar refurbishing of the former foundry earned it a spot on the National Registry of Historic Sites, and the value of the property increased by 37 percent.

Financial, Liability, Technical Assistance

This site received \$34, 545 from the Petroleum Environmental Cleanup Fund Award (PECFA) Program. The DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) staff provided technical assistance on the site investigation and remedial reports.



Lawton Foundry Town Homes
(photo taken by Michelle Stokes).

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