



# Magazine

Issue No. 3



**A SEASONAL HISTORY PUBLICATION** *of the* **POCO MUSE**

**Cover** Hotel Lembke at the southwest corner of the intersection of Jefferson and Lafayette Streets in Valparaiso, circa 1924.

**Right** From left to right: Charles Bone, Spero Valavanis, and Douglas Pierce of Design Organization, now Shive-Hattery, examine a building model, circa 1980.

# "Brick, stone, unfailing sturdiness"

In a year that celebrates Porter County's rich architectural heritage, this issue excavates *architecturally-significant objects* from our collection (page 16), exhibits the *community-minded mission* of a local architectural firm (page 4), and restores collective memories of the beloved *Premier Theatre* (page 20). What holds it all together? One of Porter County's *most prolific, almost mythical, architects*, Charles F. Lembke (page 6).

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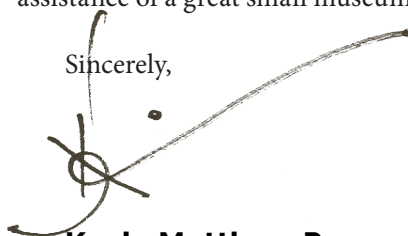
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### Dear Readers,

Helping Porter County residents develop a stronger sense of place has been an unspoken priority since the PoCo Muse first opened its doors in the lower level of the Lembke-designed Valparaiso Public Library on September 24, 1916. Much has changed since our celebration of Indiana's Centennial more than a century ago, but our museum's commitment to interpreting our surroundings remains steadfast. The stories we share in this issue of *PoCo Muse Magazine* are a great reminder that people, places, and things can make a perpetual impact with the assistance of a great small museum.

Sincerely,



**Kevin Matthew Pazour**

*Executive Director, PoCo Muse*



**Joanne Urschel**

*Chair, Board of Trustees, PoCo Muse Foundation*





# Architecture + Community

**D**esign Organization began as a name printed across a stack of unique business cards—a bold black Futura "DO" broke across the fold of a crisp, white poster board. As it sits on a table, the card forms a triangular shape, evoking a simple structure of two walls. Well before the firm had designed a single building, its business card exemplified DO's unique approach. For DO, design was at the root of every project.

*"I like to refer to it as environmental design; creating an environment and a sense of place."*

– Douglas Pierce



**Douglas Pierce** Douglas Pierce at the Court Restaurant, circa 1975

**O**n returning home to Valparaiso in 1970, Douglas Pierce had an idea to start his own architectural firm. After military service and some experience working in large firms, Pierce believed that he had the necessary tools to strike out alone. He envisioned a firm that solved problems through design.

Other than its innovative business cards, DO did not have much when it started in 1971—no book-of-business, no bank relationships, no patrons, and no permanent location. Chicago, home to countless renowned architectural firms, presented an opportunity to the fledgling firm. Though, for such a small group with so few connections, the big city could just as easily smother the nascent enterprise. Doug decided to found the firm in Valparaiso, a city he knew well.

The firm took all the work it could get, designing projects ranging from private residences to the club house of the Forest Park Golf Course. Their work on a small commercial building of the Hudson Insurance Company in Valparaiso earned them an award from the American Institute of Architects.



**Southlake Community Mental Health Center**  
Merrillville, Indiana, circa 1977

**W**hen Indiana announced it would build over thirty community mental health centers throughout the state, no architectural firm could claim expertise. DO, still finding its footing, saw an opportunity. The small staff immersed itself in research on the therapeutic milieu—in which patients' surroundings are utilized in their treatment. The state awarded DO the contract for Porter-Starke Services in Valparaiso. Gradually, the firm became recognized experts in the construction of community mental health centers.

Their work in community mental health earned the firm contracts to design a variety of medical facilities, another field that realized the importance of creating a healing environment for patients. DO's first opportunity came with their design of

*"Communities are living organisms and cannot be preserved in a point of time. They grow and develop or decay."*

– Spero Valavanis

<sup>1</sup>A selection of the downtown Valparaiso buildings and spaces that DO has designed or helped revive: 57 Franklin Center, Capital Interiors, Coffee and Tea Market, Court Restaurant, First National Bank, Gardner Elementary School, Linkimer's Shoe Store, Northern Indiana Bank, Northwest Health Amphitheatre and Central Park Plaza, Porter County Administration Building, Porter County Court House, Rotary Library Garden, Seasons on the Square, Urschel Pavilion, Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce, Valparaiso Post Office, Valparaiso YMCA, and Wark's Hardware.

Outpatient Surgery Centers for Porter Memorial Hospital in Portage and Valparaiso. The firm now works with multiple regional healthcare systems in Northwest Indiana and the Chicagoland region.

Though DO had completed several small projects for Valparaiso University, their breakthrough into higher education architecture came in 1998, when the university awarded them the contract for the Kade-Duesenberg German House. This led to additional university projects for the firm, and, eventually, connected them to other institutions, including Purdue and Ivy Tech.

**DO** was acquired by Shive-Hattery in 2014. Though it presently operates a Chicago office and works on projects throughout the country, the firm never forgot about its hometown.

Valparaiso boasts a downtown with architecture of mostly unified, turn-of-the-twentieth-century style. The sturdy construction of these brick blocks has helped them persevere into the present millennium. Though the bones are solid, the interiors of many of these structures have required extensive renovations over the years in order to satisfy modern standards.

DO has consistently embraced the opportunity to give these old buildings<sup>1</sup> new life, to show their beauty in another light, and to contribute to their future preservation. Through façade renovations and interior remodeling, they have helped contribute to a sense of place for the many people who now call Valparaiso home.

The dissolution of many midwestern downtowns sometimes results from the absence of daily visitors. One reason Valparaiso's city center has been able to weather the occasional downturn is due to the consistent presence of people who work in downtown buildings. The firm's main offices have all been located somewhere downtown, ensuring that staff members stroll its streets each weekday. DO has not single-handedly preserved downtown Valparaiso, but their commitment has served as a cornerstone to the area's present success. •



# Charles F. Lembke

by Asa Kerr

On an overcast day in early April 1988, the Hotel Lembke was set to face the wrecking ball. Crowds gathered around the five-story brick structure—they gasped and cheered as the crane operator tried again and again to fell it. An inner network of steel and concrete supports surprised the contractors tasked with the demolition. The building had been closed for about seven years, though its days as a first-rate hotel had long since passed. At sixty-five years old, the aged hotel, now half rubble, had managed to exceed the lifespan of its designer, the man whose name it bore.

## GERMAN-AMERICAN, IMMIGRANT ROOTS

Born to German immigrants in 1865, just a month before the end of the Civil War, Charles F. Lembke spent much of his life in Valparaiso and Porter County. His parents, Christian and Caroline Lembke, came the United States via Hamburg and Quebec in 1854, leaving their home at Mecklenburg-Schwerin in northern Germany. After a brief stay in Hobart, the family moved to Valparaiso. As in Germany, Christian pursued a career in masonry and construction, working on a number of local structures, the most notable of which is the 1871 Porter County Jail.

Few details of Charles' childhood are available. His niece, Carolyn Crisman, noted that her father, Christian Lembke Jr., did not recall speaking German in his home or practicing German customs. The 1900 census listed Charles' father as an English speaker, though that would be expected after nearly fifty years of working and living in Porter County. Yet, the county had a significant population of first- and second-generation German immigrants at this time, many of whom spoke German.



Portrait of the Christian LEMBKE, Sr. family, on their 50 wedding anniversary, about 1904.

standing (l-r): William, Christian Jr., Mary, Charles, Henry, and Edward  
seated (l-r): Minnie, Caroline (mother), Christian Sr. (father), and Carrie

**The Lembke Family** A family portrait, circa 1904. Charles F. Lembke is pictured standing, third from the right, courtesy of John Ellis.

**Hotel Lembke** A wrecking ball begins to demolish the Hotel Lembke, April 1988

Though the push to “Anglicize” was present, it was not nearly as prevalent as it would become in the years surrounding and following the First World War. For example, Valparaiso’s German Lutheran Church graduated two confirmation classes in 1900, one in German and one in English—both were of nearly equal size. Further, the “Teutonia Verein,” a German cultural club, was active in Valparaiso from about 1900. The group met regularly and occasionally paid for members to travel back to Germany to maintain a solid connection to the culture of the “Fatherland.” Still, many Anglo and Euro-American Porter County residents who had lived longer in the country viewed German-Americans as “others.” Unlike some of their German-American neighbors, the Lembke family did not appear to connect themselves to their German past, even when that connection was readily accessible.

*Note: Refer to the map on pages 12-13 to locate these numbered buildings.*

**1** This pressed-brick residence at 304 N Morgan Boulevard was one of the first of Charles Lembke’s many structures in Porter County.

**2** Known now as the Memorial Opera House, this structure, built in 1893, is one of the few structures shown on the map on pages 12-13 that still stands.

## A PROLIFIC CAREER

For Charles and his four brothers, construction was an obvious career path. The boys likely worked with their father as soon as they were able, picking up valuable knowledge along the way. Charles, however, distinguished himself from his brothers in his capacity to not just build, but also to design structures. In 1883, at the age of eighteen, Charles enrolled in the Preparatory Department of the Northern Indiana Normal School, what would later become Valparaiso University. Charles studied architecture at a university in Chicago, probably the University of Chicago.

Afterward, he returned to Valparaiso, where in September 1887, at the age of twenty-two, he married nineteen-year-old Cora Ann Rowe. Then, sometime before 1892, Charles built a red pressed-brick residence at 304 N Morgan Boulevard<sup>1</sup> for



**1.** **Lembke’s Home at 304 N Morgan Boulevard** • Built circa 1892, image courtesy of Steven Shook



**2.** **Memorial Hall (Memorial Opera House)** • Built in 1893

Cora and himself. The house, of sturdy construction and restrained design, inaugurated a prolific architectural career that would not only alter the county’s appearance, but what it was like to live there.

The number of structures attributed to Charles Lembke is staggering, a *Vidette-Messenger* article in 1975 asserted that he contributed to the design or construction of twenty-eight residences, eighteen schools, and twenty-seven business buildings across Northwest Indiana. These numbers are difficult to verify. Along with three of his brothers, Henry, William, and Christian Jr., Charles operated the Charles Lembke Contracting Company. For most of their building projects, Charles designed the structure, while Henry, as member of the contracting company, led the construction.

The Lembke brothers entered into their family business in a boom time for construction in Northwest Indiana. Massive brickyards in Hobart and Porter turned the clay-rich soil of those locales into a plentiful supply of red brick—the Lembke brothers themselves operated a brickyard near

**3** Later renamed Baldwin Hall, Science Hall was erected in 1900. Due to rising maintenance costs, the structure was razed in 1996.

**4** Charles’ nephew Ernest Lembke considered this university classroom building to be one of his uncle’s best works. He recalls how workers tasked with adding a doorway in the structure had to use dynamite to get through the wall — another indicator of Lembke’s sturdy design and construction style. Initially known as the Agriculture

Sager’s Lake for some time. Further, efforts to cover dirt roads with gravel increased the ease and rate of transportation in the region. The communities of Porter County grew, and, as they did, they sought new residences, schools, churches, and commercial buildings.

Though Lembke designed structures throughout Northwest Indiana, he did the majority of his work in Valparaiso and Porter County. One of Lembke’s first major projects in Valparaiso was the design of the city’s Memorial Hall,<sup>2</sup> which he furnished in 1892 at the age of twenty-seven. A building committee selected his plans for the structure, which was to serve a threefold purpose—first, as a memorial to the county’s fallen in the Civil War, then, as a meeting hall for the local Grand Army of the Republic Post, and finally, as a hall in which the community could gather for lectures, meetings, or performances. This building, which Porter County residents now know as the Memorial Opera House, still stands as a testament to the forethought of those who planned it—a stately, accessible remembrance of

one of this country's most costly conflicts.

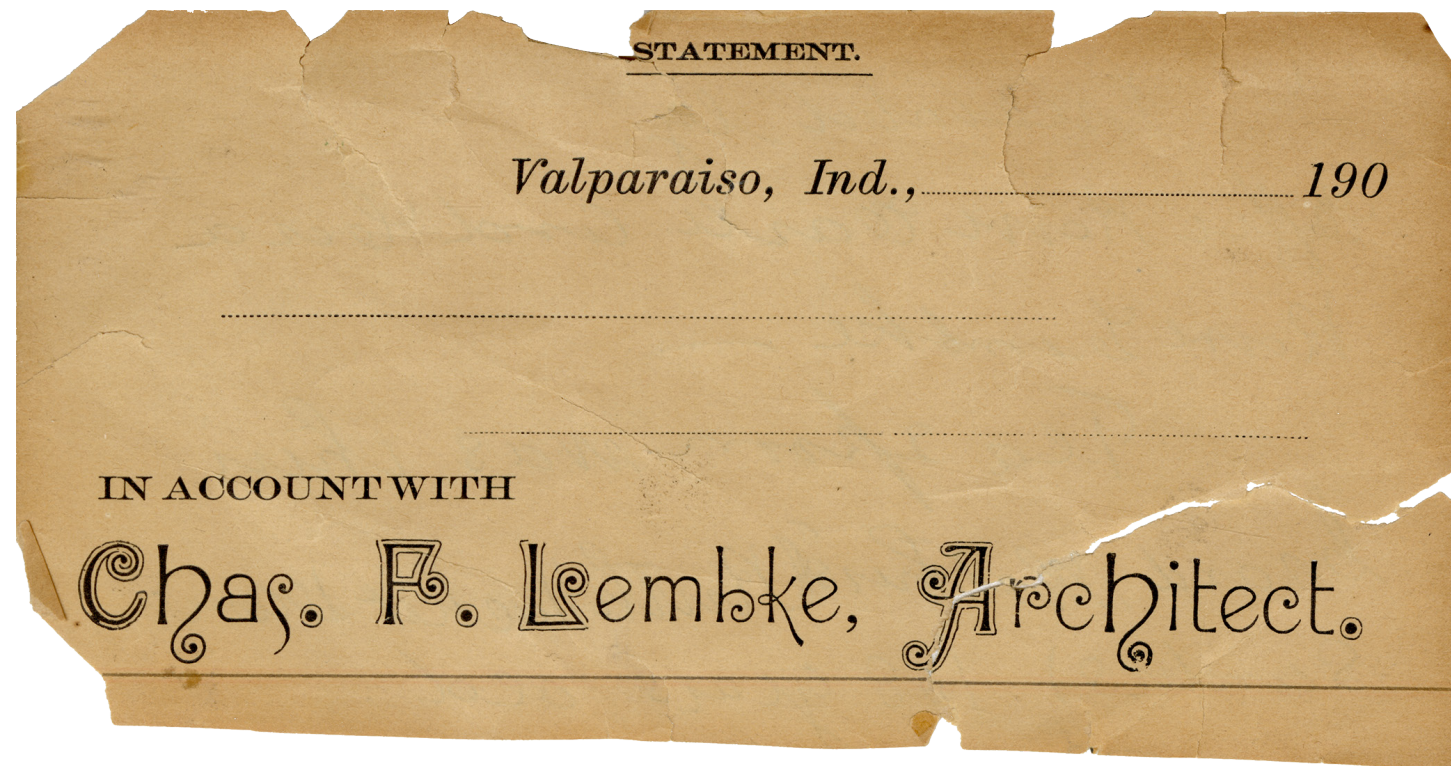
Before the age of thirty, Lembke had cemented himself as Porter County's leading architect. For the next three decades, he would design a large number of classroom buildings and dormitories for Valparaiso University's campus expansion, including Science Hall<sup>3</sup> (later renamed Baldwin Hall), the Agriculture and Domestic Science Building<sup>4</sup> (later renamed DeMotte Hall), Bogarte Hall,<sup>5</sup> and Altruria<sup>6</sup> and Lembke Halls,<sup>7</sup> among others. He also made his name in public education, designing a large number of public schools across the region. His design for the St. Clair Schoolhouse, located five miles west of Cooks Corners in Porter County's Center Township, reportedly won him an award from the French Académie d'architecture at the 1900 Paris Exposition. He designed Valparaiso's second Central School<sup>8</sup> around 1904 and a large number of country schoolhouses throughout the county. His commercial structures include the Lowenstine's Building,<sup>9</sup> the Lincoln Highway Garage, which was the county's first poured concrete building, the Premier Theatre,<sup>10</sup> and, his final project, the Hotel Lembke.<sup>11</sup>

and Domestic Science Building, the structure eventually housed much of VU's Law School. For that reason, the school renamed it in honor of VU Law School founder Mark DeMotte.

<sup>5</sup> For many years, VU Professor Martin Bogarte operated a bookstore that served VU students in the structure. In the 1950s, university bands used the basement of the structure as a rehearsal space. By the 1960s, the university converted the upper floors into classrooms.

### THE HOTEL LEMBKE, THE LAST CHAPTER

A group of investors purchased lots on the southwest corner of Lafayette and Jefferson Streets in Valparaiso in 1919 with the intention of building a hotel. Lembke signed on to design and oversee its construction, which cost around \$130,000, well over \$1 million in 2022 dollars. The grand hotel would rise five stories from the city street, with an exterior of red brick arranged in a tapestry pattern, and contain around 100 rooms. Lembke's design emphasized wide windows and sought to provide nearly every room with one. Characteristic of his work, Lembke ordered the exterior walls built fourteen inches thick at the street level. The immense scale and cost of the project exhausted Lembke, who, now fifty-eight years old, could not maintain the feverish pace of his youth. Lembke collapsed—he was taken to hospitals in Chicago and then Michigan. Unsurprisingly, Lembke hurried back to Valparaiso after partially recovering in Michigan. But it was



Charles Lembke's Business Receipt • Circa 1900



4. **Agriculture and Domestic Science Building (DeMotte Hall)**  
Built circa 1893, razed in 1996



5. **Bogarte Hall**  
Built circa 1892, razed in 1988



6. **Altruria Hall**  
Built in 1908, razed in 1985

<sup>6</sup> Altruria Hall served as a women's dormitory at Valparaiso University. VU Speech and Drama Professor Vera Hahn recalled her time living there as a student fondly: "I prospered well there. I believe those were the happiest four years of my life here at the university." At its peak, the dormitory housed between 120 and 140 students. The university stopped using Altruria Hall in the 1970s, and the structure fell into disrepair.

<sup>7</sup> Lembke Hall served as a men's dormitory. Like Altruria Hall, it boasted a large dining room. The university named the structure for the Lembke brothers, who together designed, constructed, and helped to finance the building.

<sup>8</sup> Lembke designed the second Central School, which replaced a large brick structure built there in 1871. When Central School burned in 1938, Lembke's original plans for the structure helped the city save a considerable amount of money when they rebuilt the school, which still stands today, though its has been remodeled.

<sup>9</sup> Lembke designed the third Lowenstine Department Store, which was constructed between 1914 and



7. **Lembke Hall**  
Built circa 1906, razed in 1987  
Image courtesy of Steve Shook



8. **Central School**  
Built circa 1904, burned in 1938



9. **Lowenstine Department Store**  
Built circa 1916, burned in 1996



VALPARAISO, IN  
**MAP**  
*of*  
**CHARLES LEMBKE BUILDINGS**

- |          |   |           |                                |
|----------|---|-----------|--------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | Lembke's Home<br>(304 N Morgan Blvd)                              | <b>5</b>  | Bogarte Hall                   |
| <b>2</b> | Memorial Hall<br>(Memorial Opera House)                           | <b>6</b>  | Altruria Hall                  |
| <b>3</b> | Science Hall<br>(Baldwin Hall)                                    | <b>7</b>  | Lembke Hall                    |
| <b>4</b> | Agriculture and<br>Domestic Science<br>Building<br>(DeMotte Hall) | <b>8</b>  | Central School                 |
|          |   | <b>9</b>  | Lowenstine<br>Department Store |
|          |   | <b>10</b> | Premier Theatre                |
|          |   | <b>11</b> | Hotel Lembke                   |



**Hotel Lembke** Construction begins on the southwest corner of the intersection of Jefferson and Lafayette Streets, circa 1919

too soon, his energy failed again, and he died July 18, 1923. His official cause of death is listed as fiber neuritis, with lack of sleep and exhaustion as contributing factors.

Charles' nephew Everett Lembke remembered that the entire city of Valparaiso shut down for his uncle's funeral. Lembke had earned the goodwill of his neighbors, not only through the quality of his work, but also through his trusting and honest nature. He was far from a ruthless competitor; often, it is said, his business suffered due to his insistence on not changing his initial bid, even when his own material costs increased. Local newspapers listed that a large contributor to his collapse was anxiety over the hotel project's financing. After his passing, the Foster Lumber and Coal Company continued work on the hotel, which opened in November 1923. Julius Dreschoff, the hotel's first operator, opted to name the structure in Lembke's honor.

The Hotel Lembke operated from 1924 to 1946 under the direction of Dreschoff, until his passing. During this time, the hotel was elaborately furnished and boasted a full staff of clerks, maids, and bellhops. Cora Lembke spent many of her winters at the hotel, in her own private apartment. Paul Carmichael then purchased the hotel, eventually renaming it the Lembke Motor Inn, and operating it in a similar fashion until he sold it around 1970. By the early 1980s, management of the hotel had fallen into disarray, and it closed.

In 1982, James Broadhurst purchased the Lembke with plans to refurbish the structure and

1916. This building burned in 1996.

**10** Lembke finished this project as he began work on the hotel. It was the last building he completed before his death.

**11** Lembke's last design, the Hotel Lembke, was one of the largest hotels in Porter County. Throughout two distinct eras, the hotel's interiors represented different ideals of luxury. In the 1920s, the hotel operated in a "plush" manner under the management of Julius Dreschoff. In 1957, ten years after Carmichael purchased the hotel, it experienced a major renovation, which included the opening of the Boomerang Bar, one of the county's first "Chicago-level" cocktail lounges—it featured Tommy Bott on the piano most nights.

turn it into a retirement community called "Lembke Golden." Broadhurst hired architect George Kelso to draw up plans for the remodel. Kelso spoke with glowing admiration of Lembke's work: "I am increasingly amazed at the reinforcing in this building ... It is a masterpiece. The stress patterns are carefully worked out." Plans to remodel the Lembke stalled. As part of the 150 Lincoln Square development project, local developers opted to refurbish the interior of the former Elks Temple, then Harvey's Dime Store, directly to the south of the Lembke. As part of this plan, the old hotel would be razed to make room for a forty-three car parking lot. Architect Richard Neumann, of Petoskey, Michigan, surveyed downtown Valparaiso for the city's Main Street project and reluctantly noted that, if only one of the buildings could be saved, it should be Harvey's.

Due to the vast number of buildings attributed to him, Charles Lembke has taken on an almost mythical stature in the history of Porter County. His obituary describes him as a "genial citizen, quiet and unobtrusive, and filled with honest purpose." His buildings generally reflect a reserved and practical style, like DeMotte Hall and the Central School, though he was capable of more ornate expressions, such as the Memorial Opera House. The unifying thread that links all of his structures is brick and stone construction, and their unfailing sturdiness. Though the hotel that conquered him stood for many years as his monument, there is not one single structure of Lembke's that could sufficiently honor his memory. To truly understand his impact, it is best to take them in together. Many have been demolished or have burned—but some still stand today. Lembke's life and work provided a strong foundation for Porter County's continued growth. His tireless efforts cut short his life, though they allowed him, and the laborers who built according to his plans, to forever alter the public character of Porter County. •

**Right** The Hotel Lembke seen from the southeast, circa 1950s







# From the Collection

## Mantelpiece

*Donated by: Debra and John Albers*

Photographed here is one of two identical corbels that the Albers family donated to the museum. Together, these corbels once supported a fireplace mantle in their home at 401 Lafayette Street in Valparaiso. The piece is made of a mixture of terracotta and horsehair. Horsehair plaster was commonly used in a variety of building applications throughout the turn of the century. The long strands of horsehair helped the plaster bind and maintain a strong connection. According to the donors, a previous resident of the house judged the corbels too ostentatious, and had them removed. John F. Griffin, the home's original owner, was secretary and general manager of the Chicago Mica Company for ten years.

## Sager door frame

*Donated by: Fred Frey*

This door and frame from the residence of William H. Sager were donated to the museum by Fred Frey, who salvaged them when the old home was slated for demolition. Sager operated a flour mill southeast of Valparaiso from the mid-1850s. The mill, which used a branch of Salt Creek for its water power, eventually caused the area behind it to flood, creating a mill pond later referred to as "Sager's Lake." The land around Sager's Lake and the former mill is now occupied by Lake 'O the Woods naturist club.

William Sager built a home near the mill for himself and his family. This seven foot door is one of two that entered into the Sager residence. When the carpenters finished building the nine and a half foot tall door frame, one of them wrote out Sager's name and location on the side, so they knew who ordered it and where to deliver it.





**Fire-damaged wood-cut cross**

Museum staff found this piece in the basement of the Sheriff's Residence. We believe it is from the old Immanuel Lutheran Church, now Heritage Lutheran. In 1975, a fire started in a robe room in the church and quickly spread to its main section, causing considerable damage.

Incidentally, the Porter County Museum had recently reopened in the Old Porter County Jail and Sheriff's Residence at the time of the fire. It is possible that, as refurbishing work began on the old Lutheran church, a history-minded parishioner noticed this dramatic piece and brought it over to the museum, saving it from the scrap pile. Museum curator Bertha Staulbaum, then a member of the church, would have gladly accepted such an artifact.

However, Ed Gutt, a church member of Valparaiso, remembers what the church looked like before the fire, and does not recall any pieces like this. Further, pictures of the church pre-fire do not appear to show any wood crosses like the one in our collection. Certainly, more research will be required to determine the provenance of this mysterious cross. Look at the pattern of burn marks on this piece. What can they tell you about how it was used before it burned?

**White House artifacts**

A Porter County resident found these two bricks while picking through the rubble of the old Calkins-Brown Mansion, known to most locals as "the White House." Valparaiso merchant William Calkins ordered construction of the house around 1870. Henry Baker Brown, longtime President of the Northern Indiana Normal School, who oversaw the school's transition to Valparaiso University, purchased the mansion in 1880. While he lived there, Brown reportedly entertained a number of famous guests, including William Jennings Bryan, William Howard Taft, and Eamon DeValera, President of the Irish Republic.

In 1942, George Pappas purchased the home, turning it into the White House Restaurant, which closed in 1995. From then, a few commercial enterprises attempted to occupy the structure, but none found sustained success. The residence fell into disrepair. Rather than renovate the structure,

developers opted to raze it and build condominiums on the site.

The donor noted that the red pressed brick was from the exterior of the home and likely dates to the 1870s, while the other was taken from the fireplace. The fire brick is stamped with the "WB" of the Western Brick Company of Danville, Illinois and a patent date from 1920. These two bricks, made at least fifty years apart, represent two of the many stages of life that the White House experienced through its existence. If you look closely at the photograph of Geneva Axe Brown, Henry's wife, sitting in the living room, you can see the white fireplace on the far right in the foreground. •



# Revisiting Premier Theatre

by Jeffrey Schultz

Once upon a time, there lived a family by the name of Shauer who ran a movie theater at 71 W Linconlway in Valparaiso called the Premier. It sounds like a fairy tale today because there are not too many neighborhood movie theaters around that you can rightfully call a family business.

Mr. Gustave George Shauer moved his wife Louise and their sons George and Justin to Valparaiso in 1917, having purchased a 70-acre farm near Flint Lake to operate an apple orchard. Gustave had worked as a pharmacist in Oak Brook, Illinois, for 35 years but wanted something else for his sons that they could all work as a family. Along with the orchard, Gustave purchased the former Hotel Spindler property on Lincolnway near Lafayette Street in the fall of 1919 which he later had torn down. Built in its place in 1921 was the Premier Theatre with architectural design by Charles Lembke.

Constructed with steel trusses and reinforced concrete, at a perimeter of 72 feet by 132 feet, the Premier stood mightily from 1921 to 1982 with a pressed-brick and tile front. Its lobby was tile flooring, and people still remember the red curtains, carpeting, and seat upholstery in the auditorium which held over 800 seats. Shortly after the theater's dedication on November 23, 1921, a large, majestic pipe organ like those you would see at luxurious movie palaces was installed for playing during silent movies. Justin Shauer's son George, who everyone knew as "Murph," recalled one of his very first jobs in the theater was to tear down the organ in 1938 when it was evident that "talkies" were here to stay.

Although a second-run theater, the Shauers had the ambition to acquire the latest upgrades in film exhibition equipment. The first sound film at the Premier, *The Shopworn Angel* starring Gary Cooper, was tested with a Vitaphone sound-on-disc system in 1929 to great applause. The theater

*It's hard to close your eyes and picture the Premier Theatre without seeing those big, gold letters.*

switched to the RCA Photophone a year later which produced synchronized sound from the movies' soundtrack. This feature was very important in the 1930s with the popularity of musicals.

Besides film technology, the Premier became one of the first buildings in town to have air conditioning. A special compartment built in 1932 on the roof held large fans that could change out the air of its auditorium every three minutes.

One of the most distinguishing features of these neighborhood movie theaters is a front marquee. It's hard to close your eyes and picture the Premier Theatre without seeing those big, gold letters. The marquee used for the Premier's opening was vertical, but on the evening of March 2, 1936, the Shauers turned the switch on their new 25 feet wide and ten feet tall neon sign. More than 800 light bulbs and rows of red and blue neon tubes were lit and made the street look like daylight.

While the Premier was the shining star of Valparaiso's movie houses, the Shauers, at one time, managed both the Lake Theater on Franklin Street and the Memorial Opera House in tandem. The Lake Theater changed its name several times before the Shauers took over. It originally was the Schelling Music Hall and began showing movies in 1914. It was renamed the Valpo Theater, then renamed again as the Varsity Theater, and finally as the Lake Theater after the Shauers acquired it in the late 1920s. When the Shauers opened the Memorial Opera House as their third theater in late 1935, a scenic artist was hired to "dress up" the building's interior and exterior.

Through its existence, the Premier Theatre



doubled as a community center. It held events like Crop-Dairy Days for farmers, local high school band performances, and various conventions. Every December, the Premier hosted the annual First National Bank Christmas Party. One thousand lucky children greeted Santa Claus, took part in a bike giveaway, and watched cartoons. The building also housed a candy shop run by Wally and Fannie Philley, the Harley Snyder and Son real estate office, a resale shop, and a floral shop.

Business at the movies slowed into the early 1980s. The Shauers cited this as the main reason for closing the Premier in 1982. Meanwhile, they were unable to convince the Valparaiso City Council not to issue a \$900,000 bond for the construction of a six-screen cinema in the new County Seat Plaza. A few months after the new theater opened, the Shauers sold the Premier property to First Federal Savings and Loans Association of Valparaiso. A clean-out

**One thousand lucky children greeted Santa Claus, took part in a bike giveaway, and watched cartoons.**

sale on October 1, 1982, cleared the equipment, tools and memorabilia before demolition of the theater began. Crews took months removing the building's concrete structure as fans watched in mourning.

Three decades later, the City of Valparaiso hired Design Organization to design the Porter Health, now Northwest Health, Amphitheater at Central Park on the former Premier site. The project was completed in 2011. In the warmer months, the community can gather there to enjoy outdoor concerts, plays, and movie nights. Nancy Murphy, great-granddaughter of Gustave Shauer, wrote to the Valparaiso Parks Department saying she believes her family would be proud to know the location will be used to build the community through entertainment, just as the Premier did for 60 years. •



**Premier Marquee** This photograph from 1978 captures the marquee advertising a film from that summer, *Jaws 2*. Notice the paraphrase of the famous and oft-parodied tagline from the film, “Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water.”

**POCO MUSE**

**pocomuse.org**

The award-winning PoCo Muse maintains free general admission as this area's oldest institution devoted to the history and culture of Porter County.

**20 Indiana Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46383  
(219) 510.1836**

This newly-imagined and fully-accessible space is home to the PoCo Muse Collection and exhibit space dedicated to the history and culture of Porter County.

**Hours: Reopening May 2022  
Tuesday-Sunday, 11a-4p**

**1871 PORTER COUNTY JAIL**

**153 S Franklin Street, Valparaiso, IN 46383  
(219) 465.3595**

The 1871 Porter County Jail is one of the oldest structures in downtown Valparaiso. This historic site operated by the PoCo Muse will be home to the first and only exhibit telling the story of the old jail.

**Hours: Currently closed to the public**

**POCO MUSE FOUNDATION**

**20 Indiana Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46383  
(219) 510.1916**

The PoCo Muse Foundation is a private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization that supports the operation of the Porter County Museum, cares for its expansive collection of local artifacts, and advocates for increased exposure to regional history and the arts in Porter County.



**Address**

20 Indiana Avenue  
Valparaiso, IN 46383

**E-mail**

info@pocomuse.org

**Call**

(219) 510-1836

**Visit**

pocomuse.org

**Connect**

@pocomuse

**Give**

pocomuse.org/  
donate

**MISSION**

We engage Porter County's rich past with its evolving present to educate, enrich, and inspire our communities.

**VISION**

We believe our work of interpreting this area's history and culture empowers Porter County residents to form a strong and purposeful sense of place, identity, and community.

**RECOGNITION OF SUPPORT**

The PoCo Muse is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; members and donors; private and family foundations, including the John W. Anderson Foundation; and by Porter County Government.

**VOLUNTEER**

Would you like to volunteer your time at the PoCo Muse? Email Quinn Albert at quinn@pocomuse.org with your interests and general availability.

**DONATE AN ARTIFACT**

Visit pocomuse.org/donate-an-artifact to start the process of donating an artifact to the PoCo Muse.

**WHY CONTRIBUTE?**

Monetary gifts made to the PoCo Muse Foundation enable our employees to create mission-driven programs and exhibits, preserve our vast collection of artifacts, and engage the public in ways that make the PoCo Muse an award-winning institution.



**Last Look!** This image of Valparaiso University's Science Hall, later renamed Baldwin Hall, was designed by Charles F. Lembke and constructed in 1900 near the terminus of S Locust Street in university's old campus. This photograph of the south façade was one of many taken in 1996 just days before the building was razed.