

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

Historic and Cultural Resources Assessment



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

Historic and Cultural Resources Assessment

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Historic and Cultural Resources Assessment

This chapter of the *Comprehensive Plan* describes the historic resources of the City of Eau Claire as well as the programs and organizations that assist in the preservation of these resources. In addition, major issues facing the community relating to historic preservation are also identified in this chapter.

Eau Claire recognized the importance of preserving its historic resources and initiated a preservation program back in the 1970s. As many of the community's architecturally and historically important buildings were demolished in the early and mid 1900s, citizens became increasingly concerned about preserving the remaining significant buildings and sites for future generations. As the preservation program has grown, the community has experienced the broad range of benefits that preserving the City's historic resources brings; such as preserving a sense of place and uniqueness of the community, neighborhood preservation and stabilization, and increased tourism and economic benefits.

Major Historic or Cultural Issues

These are the major community historic resources issues identified through the analysis of conditions. Issues are questions to be discussed, debated and resolved during the planning process in light of other issues identified in other chapters.

- 1. Protection:** Are the City's historic resources adequately protected?
- 2. Coordination:** How can the Landmarks Commission, Historic Preservation Foundation, Chippewa Valley Museum and other organizations better coordinate efforts to promote and educate the community about historic preservation?
- 3. Preservation Incentives:** Should additional incentives be made available to encourage the preservation and restoration of significant buildings, and should such incentives be made available to older "non-significant" buildings?
- 4. Opted-Out Properties:** How should the City address the current status of the districts and individual properties that opted out of their historic designation in 1992?
- 5. Downtown:** Do the buildings downtown need some level of additional recognition, designation or protection?
- 6. Citizen Interest:** What can be done to increase citizen interest in preservation of Eau Claire's historic resources?

- 7. Support:** How can the City and other groups work with neighborhoods and individuals to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the benefits of historic preservation?
- 8. Education:** How can the Landmarks Commission strengthen its educational role in the community?
- 9. New Materials:** How can preservation interests be balanced with some property owner interests in reducing maintenance of their property by utilizing new types of building materials and new technology?
- 10. Tourism Promotion:** How can historic preservation be utilized as a more effective tool to promote tourism within the community?

Identification of Historic Properties and Sites

A successful historic preservation program starts with the identification of a community's historic resources. This generally occurs when a community completes an *"Intensive Historic and Architectural Survey"*. This survey is conducted by an architectural historian that researches various aspects of a community's history, including: the development and growth of the community, the architecture of its buildings and the history relating to important events and persons that helped shape the community.

The historic resources of Eau Claire fall into four categories:

- National Register of Historic Places
- The State Register of Historic Places
- Those properties identified as having local significance
- A combination of the above.

The Wisconsin Historical Society and the National Parks Service administer the National Register. Properties listed on the National and State Registers are typically nominated by local municipalities with assistance from the State. These are properties that are culturally, historically or architecturally significant when compared to similar properties from across the state or nation. Owners of these properties are eligible for federal and state income tax credits for the restoration and rehabilitation of these properties and are protected from inappropriate actions funded through federal programs.

Properties having local significance are those designated by the Eau Claire Landmarks Commission as having local historical or architectural significance. There is some overlap between the federal, state and local programs as properties can be listed on more than one of the registers. The provisions for these properties are described in more detail on page 12-5.

Please refer to pages 12-8 and 12-9 for a further description of the districts and individual properties.

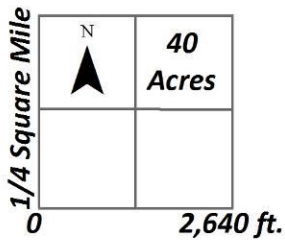
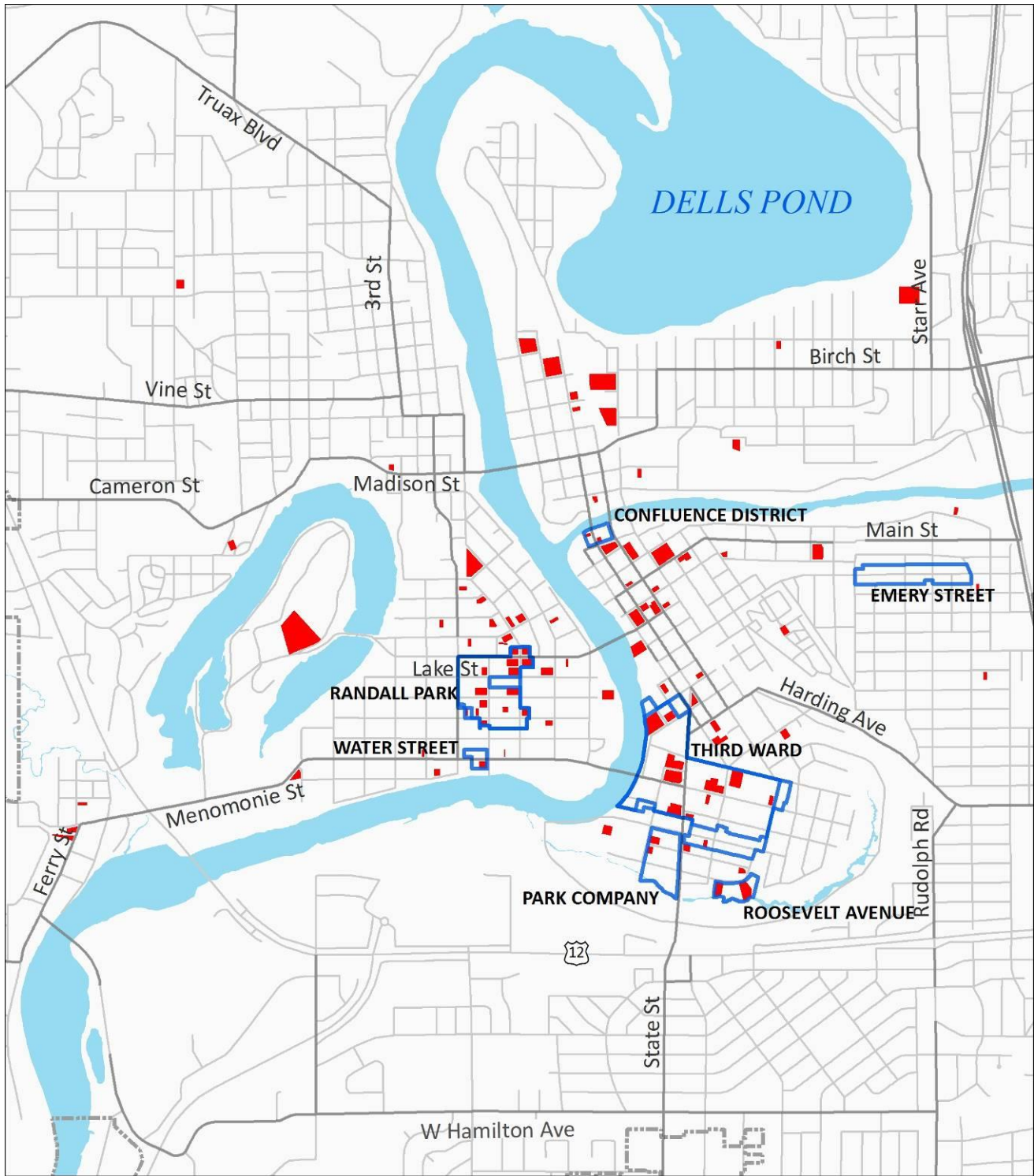
Figure 12-1 shows the locations of all the National Register districts and individual properties.

In Eau Claire, the historic survey described above was initiated in 1983 with the completion of the *Intensive Historic and Architectural Survey of Eau Claire, Wisconsin*. This survey was conducted for the City by a consultant utilizing a grant from the Wisconsin Historical Society. Such surveys are completed for many communities across the State and are based on standards established by the State.

Eau Claire's survey resulted in the identification of approximately 26 individual properties and 3 districts having some form of historical or architectural significance. In addition, hundreds of additional properties were surveyed and cataloged providing notations about their history, architectural style and date of construction. The locations of these properties are shown by Figure 12-1.

The survey has been updated periodically since 1983 with major updates in 1987, 1996 and 2010. From these updates, one National Register District was expanded (Third Ward) and four new districts were added to the National Register. In addition, 15 individual properties were added to the National Register based on information obtained from the updated surveys. The locally-designated districts and individual properties are also shown on Figure 12-1. There are currently two historic districts that are locally-designated and 44 individual properties.

The secondary component of the survey included research about the history and settlement of Eau Claire. This consists of sixteen thematic historical chapters relating to such topics as: industry and commerce, government, neighborhood development, transportation, architecture, notable persons, education, etc. This document serves as the foundation for the identification of significant historical and architectural resources in the City.





-  National or Local Historic Districts
-  Nationally- or Locally-Designated Historic Properties

Figure 12-1
Historic Properties

Local Historic Resources Program

Local Ordinance Provisions

The Eau Claire Landmarks Commission is a seven-member citizen board that was created in 1976. Members of the Commission are appointed by the City Council and have been given the charge of encouraging the preservation of the City's architecturally and historically significant buildings, neighborhood and sites. In addition, the Commission works to foster a sense of pride in the community's historic and architectural resources through educational and promotion activities and programs.

Landmarks Ordinance: As part of the Commission's responsibilities, the City's Landmarks Ordinance (Chapter 2.65 of the Municipal Code) provides for the designation of properties and districts that have been identified by the Commission as having local historical or architectural significance. The purpose of designating the properties and districts is to provide a mechanism to encourage the preservation of these resources. The Commission utilizes the City's Intensive Historic Survey and other research materials to determine if a property or area should be considered for local designation. If such properties are determined to be locally eligible based on the criteria of the ordinance, they are designated by the Commission and any proposed designation can be appealed to the City Council.

Recognition: Properties that are designated as local landmarks are subject to several provisions of the Landmarks Ordinance. First, each individually designated property is recognized with the installation of a yard plaque, which notes the importance of the property. The plaque is installed by the Commission, if desired by the property owner.

Exterior Renovation Reviews: Secondly, to help ensure that the exterior architectural integrity of a building is retained, the Commission reviews any exterior renovation work that would require a building permit. Standards for the Commission's review are contained in the ordinance and actions of the Commission can be appealed to the City Council. The Commission's review pertains only to exterior work requiring a building permit. Therefore, many maintenance related types of work such as painting, storm window repair or replacement, gutters, window replacement, etc. are not reviewed by the Commission. Demolition of a designated property is also regulated by the Commission and can occur only under special and unique circumstances.

Financial Assistance: Finally, designated properties are eligible for low interest rehabilitation loans from the Commission. Only residential properties are eligible for this loan program at the present time. Eligible rehabilitation includes exterior related activities and interior work related to heating systems, asbestos removal and electrical upgrades. Funds for the loan program are from the City's Community Development Block Grant Program.

Certified Local Government Program

The Wisconsin Historical Society participates in a national program called the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program. The objective of this program is to promote the preservation of historic resources in communities and provide some incentives for local units of government to do so. In order to become certified for the program, a local unit of government must satisfy several criteria, including:

- Adopt a local preservation ordinance containing provisions regarding local designations
- Appoint persons to the local commission having backgrounds in history and architecture
- Maintain an updated inventory of historic properties
- Provide adequate public participation in the local historic preservation program.

The City of Eau Claire was approved for the CLG program in 1985 and has received 12 grants from the State Historical Society through the program. These grants have totaled over \$118,000. Projects completed from these grants include: updating the City's Intensive Historic Survey, preparing National Register nominations, preparing educational materials such as newsletters and brochures, sponsoring workshops, etc.

Historic Resources Education

Since the Eau Claire Commission was created in 1976, the Commission has pursued their role of education and promotion relating to historic preservation. Activities undertaken by the Commission have attempted to target a variety of groups and organizations as well as a wide range of age groups. These activities have been funded from a variety of sources including the Commission annual budget which is appropriated by the City Council (approximately \$4,500 per year), the Community Development Block Grant Program, grants from the Certified Local Government Program, revenues from the sale of educational materials produced by the Commission and donations from individuals, groups and organizations.

Examples of projects and activities undertaken by the Commission include: publishing the Landmarks Tour Booklet, development of a 4th grade curriculum on Eau Claire history, sponsoring workshops, publishing historic preservation calendars, compiling a resource library for landmark homeowners, compiling a listing of preservation contractors, utilizing landmark street names signs to distinguish historic district boundaries, erecting historic markers along the recreational trail, erecting landmark yard plaques to recognize individual landmark properties, preparation of brochures and posters and the distribution of annual newsletters.

Significant Properties and Sites

There are **seven historic districts** or areas that have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

- The Randall Park Historic District
- The Third Ward Historic District
- The Emery Street Bungalow District

Created since the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan*:

- The Park Company District
- The Water Street Commercial District
- The Confluence Commercial District
- The Roosevelt Avenue District.

Two local districts have been designated by the City. These include the Randall Park Historic Landmark District and the Third Ward Historic Landmark District. The boundaries of the National and local districts differ somewhat. Figure 12-1 illustrates the boundaries of these districts.

Currently, the number of **individual properties** that are listed or eligible for the **National and State Register** has grown to 41. This number has increased since the City's initial Intensive Historic Survey as more detailed surveys have been completed since that time and properties not considered significant back in 1983 are now listed as such. In addition, 44 individual properties are designated as **local landmark properties** within the City. Figure 12-1 shows the location of the individual properties that are listed on the National, State or local registers. A detailed description of each property is available from the Department of Community Development.

The Landmarks Commission continues to work with the Wisconsin Historical Society to determine if any additional properties or potential historic districts may be eligible for the National or State Registers. The City anticipates working with the Wisconsin Historical Society to undertake another update of the City's historic survey, possibly starting in 2015.

Tables 12-1 and 12-2 summarize the status of the historic districts and the properties within each.

**Table 12-1
Summary of Historic Districts and Properties**

District Name	Type	Number of Properties	Year Created
Randall Park	Residential	64 ¹	1983
Third Ward	Residential	199 ²	1983 ³
Emery Street	Residential	63	1983
Park Company	Residential	40	2003
Roosevelt Avenue	Residential	6	2008
Confluence	Commercial	6	2006
Water Street	Commercial	21	2006

¹ 42 of these properties are also within the Randall Park local historic district.

² 113 of these properties are also within the Third Ward local historic district.

³ The Third Ward National Register District was expanded in 2003.

**Table 12-1
Individual Historic Properties Not within Districts**

	Number of Properties
National Register only	18
Local historic register only	21
Listed both nationally and locally	22
Total	61

Rescinded Local Designations

In 1992, the City Council acted upon a request of several property owners that wished to have the local landmark designation of their properties removed or rescinded. The Council adopted a provision that allowed property owners a thirty-day period to remove the local designation status from their property. Several individually designated properties as well as a significant number of properties within the Randall Park and Third Ward Historic Landmark Districts chose to do so.

The result of this action compromised the integrity of the districts as it left a portion of the properties within the districts still subject to the provisions of the City of Eau Claire's Landmarks Ordinance (Chapter 2.65 of the Municipal Code). These properties must still follow the provisions of the ordinance that requires that any exterior work that would require a building permit would first be reviewed by the Landmarks Commission. Those properties opting-out are not subject to these provisions.

Allowing the properties to be removed from the local designation was quite controversial and created much debate and disagreement. The issue pitted those promoting the preservation of Eau Claire's historic buildings against those that opposed the regulation of their properties as provided in the City's ordinance. Since 1992, only a small number of property owners have had their properties re-designated as local landmarks.

The Landmarks Commission, at the direction of the City Council, prepared a report in 2011 on the status of the opted-out properties for the Third Ward Historic Landmark District. The Commission contacted property owners in the district to obtain input regarding the feasibility of implementing various methods to reinstate properties to the district. As of September, 2014, the report had yet to be forwarded to the City Council, and the Landmarks Commission would like to see the issue discussed by the City Council upon completion of the update of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

Historic or Cultural Preservation Plans

Since the Landmarks Commission was created in 1976, several plans relating to historic preservation have been prepared and adopted by the City. These plans summarized below range from looking at historic preservation from a community-wide perspective to focusing on small areas having historic and architectural significance.

Importantly, the publication of *The Good Life* by the Chippewa Valley Museum in 2012 began a new conversation about what culture means in the broadest sense and how it contributes to quality of life in Eau Claire County.

Eau Claire Historic Preservation Plan

The *Eau Claire Historic Preservation Plan* is an element of the City's *Comprehensive Plan*. It was originally prepared in 1982 and was updated in 1988. This plan provides a community-wide focus relating to the goals and implementation strategy for the City's historic preservation program. Specific goals outlined in the plan include:

- Preserve and maintain landmarks and historic districts, which represent or reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- Safeguard the City's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in such landmarks and historic districts.
- Stabilize and improve property values in the City through the enhancement of the vitality and livability of neighborhoods.
- Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.
- Protect and enhance the City's attractions to residents, tourists and visitors.
- Serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry.
- Promote the economic development in the City, which incorporates the preservation and continued use or reuse of historic structures.
- Promote the use of landmarks and historic districts for the education, pleasure and the welfare of the people of the City.
- Coordinate historic preservation with other planning and development programs of the City. These include, but are not limited to: economic development, land use planning, park and recreation planning, capital improvement programming and neighborhood planning.

Randall Park Historic Landmark District Plan

The Randall Park Historic Landmark District Plan was prepared in 1983 in conjunction with the Landmarks Commission's designation of the Randall Park Historic District as a local landmark district. Preparation of a district plan is a requirement of the City's Landmarks Ordinance pursuant to the designation of a local historic district. The plan describes the historic significance of the district and established the review guidelines that are to be used by the Commission when reviewing proposed additions and exterior alterations to structures within the district.

Third Ward Historic Landmark District Plan

The Third Ward Historic Landmark District Plan was prepared in 1984 in conjunction with the Landmarks Commission's designation of the Third Ward Historic District as a local landmark district. This plan is similar to the Randall Park District Plan as it is a requirement of the City's Landmarks Ordinance pursuant to the designation of a local historic district. The plan describes the historic significance of the district and established the review guidelines that are to be used by the Commission when reviewing proposed additions and exterior alterations to structures within the district.

The Good Life: A Cultural Direction for Eau Claire County

The culture of a community is expressed by far more than just buildings. Therefore, *The Good Life: A Cultural Direction for Eau Claire County* examined what makes Eau Claire County a good place to live and described the breadth and depth of the area's creative and cultural resources. The plan was prepared by the Chippewa Valley Museum in 2012.

The overall intention of *The Good Life* plan is to integrate arts and culture more deeply into every aspect of life in the county, from economic development plans to the signs on the highway to the way downtown feels to opportunities for everyone to learn in and about the arts. And while the plan focuses on residents of the area, there is also recognition that cultural and heritage tourism holds great potential for Eau Claire.

Ultimately, the goal of *The Good Life* is to make Eau Claire County a more creative place where people see value in their own and other's artistic achievements.

Recommended Actions of *The Good life Plan*

Outdoors and Waterways

1. Brand our county waterways in a consistent, attractive campaign.
2. Implement one river-centered event annually. Foster development of seasonal river-centered events.
3. Ensure that all waterways, parks and outdoor recreation plans incorporate the cultural interests of residents and visitors.
4. As we continue developing and changing Eau Claire County's cities, villages, and other settlements, planners should emphasize that considered, sustainable development should "face the rivers," and that waterways should be part of the fabric of public life in the County.

Economic Development

1. Support places where creative individuals want to be and can interact.
2. Encourage interest and enterprises based on our arts and cultural strengths.

Downtown

1. Use our unique community identity to increase public awareness of and participation in downtown revitalization efforts.

2. Leverage our unique community identity to continue efforts to improve downtown's infrastructure and economy. Support Downtown Eau Claire as a center of cultural life for the City and County of Eau Claire.

Tourism

1. Understand What We Have.
2. Understand our "Quality of Place." Articulate what is distinctive about Eau Claire County culture/heritage. From this, develop a vision for visitor experience in the future.
3. Develop a partnership for cultural and heritage tourism.
4. Develop Eau Claire County as a cultural and heritage tourism destination.
5. Develop plans and specific activities based on current resources/skills available and understanding of gaps.

Education

1. Infuse arts, history and heritage content into all educational experiences.
2. Provide more educational opportunities for arts, history and heritage.
3. Build stronger connections between local schools, organizations and cultural representatives..
4. Education for creative workers should include how to manage their career in the real world.

Aesthetics and Character

1. Value and enhance the aesthetics of the rivers.
2. Incorporate aesthetic elements, cultural activities and gathering spots into all parks and commercial areas. Continue the design standards established for Phoenix Park.
3. Improve entrances and wayfinding.
4. Respect and protect historic buildings and neighborhood character.
5. Encourage neighborhood-based programs and events.
6. Encourage all EC County municipalities to be as specific about historic preservation and aesthetic components as they are about recreational resources.

Access

1. Improve navigation and transportation in the city and the county.
2. Create walkable, interconnected neighborhoods and cities.

Historic Preservation Organizations

In addition to the historic preservation program established through the City pursuant to Chapter 2.65, which creates the Eau Claire Landmarks Commission, several other groups or organizations exist in the community, those charges relate to Eau Claire’s historic resources and history. These groups include:

Chippewa Valley Museum

The Chippewa Valley Museum is a regional museum that was established in 1974. It is located within Carson Park and has approximately 14 employees. The mission of the Museum is “to discover, collect, preserve and interpret all aspects of the past and present life in the Chippewa Valley.” The Museum’s collections include over 16,000 artifacts, over 25,000 archival items and three historic structures (Sunnyview School, the Anderson Log House and the Schlegelmilch House). The Museum offers several long-term exhibits as well as a number of short-term exhibits depicting many aspects of the history and development of the Chippewa Valley. In addition, the Museum maintains an extensive library of books, photographs and maps of the Chippewa Valley.

Paul Bunyan Logging Camp of Eau Claire

The Paul Bunyan Logging Camp of Eau Claire provides exhibits and displays pertaining the logging era of the Chippewa Valley and northern Wisconsin. In addition to an interpretive center, the Paul Bunyan Camp includes a bunkhouse building, cook shanty, blacksmith shop, barn, and logging heavy equipment building. The Paul Bunyan Camp is also located in Carson Park, adjacent to the Chippewa Valley Museum.

Historic Preservation Foundation of Eau Claire

The Historic Preservation Foundation of Eau Claire is a volunteer-run non-profit group that was formed in 1987 whose mission is “to engage in activities which will educate and encourage citizens of Eau Claire, present and future, to enjoy with pride their cultural heritage as is embodied in the built environment through the preservation of historic property located in the Eau Claire area.” The Foundation has been involved in a variety of educational and promotion activities and events geared towards historic preservation within the Eau Claire area. Examples of these activities include: historic home tours, scholarships, grants, bus tours, “house hunts” and awards programs.

Waldemar Ager Association

The Waldemar Ager Association was formed in 1992 in an effort to save the Waldemar Ager family home that was located on Chestnut Street. The Association was successful in moving the home to 514 West Madison Street and has been working on restoring the home in recent years. Ager was an influential Norwegian-American author and editor. Related goals of the Association are to preserve and study the works of Waldemar Ager, preserve and study the literary contributions of other immigrants in the Chippewa Valley, and provide a meeting place and study center for those interested in the work of Chippewa Valley immigrants.

Area Research Center

The Area Research Center is located in McIntyre Library on the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire campus. The Research Center maintains special collections of maps, manuscripts, local public records, photographs and rare books relating to West Central Wisconsin.

Communication between these organizations and groups (including the Landmarks Commission) varies to some degree. There is formal communication between the Commission and Foundation as both have established a policy of having one person serve on both boards in order to coordinate activities. Coordination between the other organizations is somewhat dependent upon on-going projects and needs.

Archaeologic Resources

There are a number of prehistoric and archaeological sites in and around Eau Claire. These resources and sites are documented and cataloged by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Archeology. Information regarding these sites can be obtained from the State Archaeologist. However, the locations of these sites are not published in order to protect them from disturbance and vandalism.