

Historical Facts, Fiction and Fun



Commissioned in 1854 and built by 1857, the William T. and Jane Leitch home is a gorgeous, brick and sandstone mansion on the shores of Lake Mendota.

In 1975 it was added to the [National Register of Historic Places](#), as "the best example of mid-19th century Gothic Revival style" in Madison, and for its association with the city mayors and legislator who lived there. In 1862 William was elected

mayor of Madison and served three terms. He also served as president of the school board, the horticultural society and city assessor. When the family sold the house in 1880, they marketed the home as having "every convenience for a comfortable and pleasant home. The stable, carriage house, cow house, etc., are all stone buildings. The grounds... are laid out in lawn, fruit, and vegetable gardens. The view of [Fourth Lake](#) is unsurpassed."^[1]



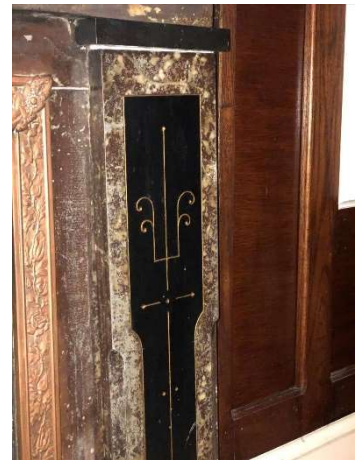
There is a rumor that Leitch stopped in St. Helena at Napoleon's grave while on a trip where he took with him willow saplings that he then planted in a row along Lake Mendota. The "Napolean Willows" hold interest with conservationists in Madison, and their descendants can be found in other historic locations along the lake. He was a yachtsman who loved the water. Most of that lake frontage was sold off years ago by subsequent owners, but a small 10x10 brick patio remains with the potential for someone to have their own pier according to the current owner of The Livingston Inn.



Constructed of sandstone and brick that was brought via barge across the lake from Westport, the mansion cost an exorbitant \$14,000 to build, but with a possible secret "Civil War" tunnel that went from under the house to a neighboring estate (evidence of such is yet to be found); and apparently one of the first indoor, flush toilets in a home in the City of Madison, its no wonder no expense was spared.

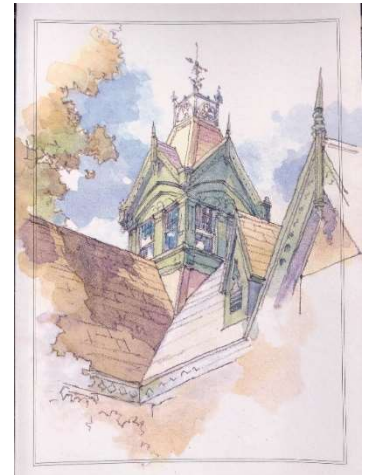
11' ceilings show off the expansive formal and informal parlors to receive or entertain guests. A separate entrance completes what was then the "Library", but today could be classified as a home office. Gas lights in the house, thankfully never burned it down as was the fate of many other buildings in those days, including the State Capitol and Bascom Hall domes.

The Italian marble fireplaces in every room of the home served as heat sources before modern conveniences were added. Three in the formal main floor rooms are all matching in character and style, but the rest vary as much as the residents of this grand home.



The mansion's style is [Gothic Revival](#), and the design is attributed to August Kutzbock, a premier architect in the Madison area in the 1850s and 1860s, though there are no entries for this property in his ledger. He was responsible for much of the architecture in the Madison area, particularly the Mansion Hill Inn neighborhood and downtown/near east Madison. Unfortunately, after a disagreement over the design of State Capitol dome, he departed for California only to return a number of years later, his fortune greatly changed. Rumor has it he took his own life in 1868 walking into the lake at Picnic Point and dying of exposure.

Though you won't find any sketches on the walls, it's said that Frank Lloyd Wright played in the basement of this home when he was a young child, having grown up nearby and attending Lincoln School. You will find an attic in which time stood still; perfect for children to play hide in seek in, complete with a cupola up top. The new owners installed a secret door behind the bookshelf allowing staff to traverse from one side of the home to the other instead of climbing up or down one of the three stairwells or being relegated to a maid's quarters and stairwell at the back of the home by the old kitchen entrances. The original kitchen housed in the basement had a dumb waiter, which was removed during the modernization/remodel in 2020. All the baths are updated, with modern plumbing and fireplaces converted to gas.





William T. Leitch, was a Renaissance Man. He owned his own business, served as Mayor of Madison for three terms, and proudly showed off the “largest egg” one of his hens laid; they had outbuildings and livestock on this property in his day. The conservatory served as both a lovely breakfast nook and makeshift greenhouse for the family in the growing season.



Have you ever walked in the footsteps of history, knowing your hopes and dreams mirror those who lived before you? Own a piece of Madison's history. Honor this story while telling your own through the ages to come.

