

### ***The Partnership***

The building you are in began in 1924 with the amalgam of ideas of two men, Calvin Helming and Victor Wernecke. On August 1 of that year they purchased Badger Auto Sales, the Chevrolet dealership, and renamed it H-W Motor Sales. The new company remained in the Odd Fellows Building, 427 E. Mill St. for a little more than five years. During that time the new owners built a reputation for conscientious service and becoming valued dealers in the Janesville Chevrolet district.

### ***The Architecture***

Helming and Wernecke transformed their ideas into reality with ground breaking for this building at 110 North Street. Here the ideas of the past five years unfolded. This was more than a business structure; it was a design for making a better more modern business. They selected the architectural firm of W. C. Weeks, Inc. for the plans and construction supervision. This firm had an established history for quality designs and innovative approaches. That innovation was enhanced with the addition in 1928 of William F. Weeks, the nephew of William C. Weeks, who had recently graduated from the Chicago Institute of Technology.

The architecture designed by the Weeks firm for the H-W Motor Sales building captured the transitional spirit of the day in its function and design. A cursory glance shows the influences of Cubism in the glass brick. Art Deco in the arched windows and plastered walls, and Modernism in the simplicity of lines. The Sheboygan Press referred to the building in a news article as “a work of art”. The building’s beauty complemented its function design. In the showroom large glass panes provided an open feeling with the use of natural light. The south wall of the shop contained large windows which could be opened by the workmen. And additional natural light filtered through a number of skylights in the ceiling. It was a modern trend in architectural design that placed human convenience, comfort, and health ahead of architectural flourish. It was the hallmark of the Bauhaus school of architecture in Germany. It was a seminal sign of changing perspectives in architectural thinking.

### ***The Construction***

Crastmanship in the building matched that of the design. Masonry and general contracting was handled by H.E. Van Wagner Construction Co. Take a look at the ceilings and you will see the steel beams erected by H.C. Heiden & Son. In the showroom some of the carpentry of Edwin Sebald is visible. Martin Bachanz and Son took care of painting and decorating. Reinhold and Meyer provided the sheet metal work and the ventilation system. Rhode Bros. did the heating plumbing and electrical work. And what modern garage would be complete without a set of pneumatic doors which could be opened with the push of a button from the showroom to let in cars? All was in readiness for the grand opening which was held on February 22 and 23, 1930. The total cost of this up to date building: \$30,000.

### ***The Workers***

With the new building came many of the craftsmen who worked for the former Badger Auto Sales and remained with H-W Motor Sales: Hugo Gessert, Roland Blanke, Amandus W. Krampe. Those who came later found H-W a good place to stay. This is a tribute to the owners and their philosophy, the working conditions, and the building itself. Bill Klemme, who worked as a mechanic in 1951 and 1952, testified that even in winter the building was comfortable to work in. Perhaps by accident or maybe by plan the building incorporated the Baushaus idea of a place to grow in.

H-W Moto Sales business was a solidly planned as the building which housed it. That planning was tested during the early crucial years. In 1933 the same year that the Oldsmobile line was added, Victor Wernecke's partner and friend Calvin Helming died. Vic, as he was known to most people, acquired the business and sustained it though the depression without having to lay off workers. Margaret Wernecke, Vic's daughter, recounts that the garage did more than fix and sell cars, it provided a social atmosphere for visitors who enjoyed an occasional game of Shafskoph or just some congenial socializing. By 1939 the number of employees had increased to also include Alvin Frantz, Roland Robb, Howard Helmer, Stan Wetzel, and Les Wetzel.

### ***In Transition***

The business changed hands in 1945-1946 when Hufo Fwaawer, Les Wetzel, Amandus Krampe, and Norman Horneck bought the building. The dealership went to being an Oldsmobile-Buick and Cadillac garage. Several years later in 1954 Hugo Gessert bought the other members out and became the sole owner. He, in turn, sold the building to Ed James from Minnesota. For a while it was used as a storage facility by Plymouth Industrial Products and Stokely- Van Camp.

The building was returned to its original function of a garage and auto sales facility when Hub City Auto Sales, Inc. moved from its Highland Avenue address into the building in 1973. The corporation, consisting of Merlin Gutschow, president; Bill Klemme, vice president; and Mrs. Merlin Gutschow; secretary and treasurer, brought the American Motors and Dodge dealership to the building. Hydraulic hoists were added on the west side of the building which incidently led to the discovery of the foundation of an old horse stable, part of which served as the foundation for the current building.

In 1987 Chuck Van Horn acquired the building and the Dodge dealership. An electrical fire brought the use of the building as a car dealership to an end. During 1994 the Gentine family saw the inherent value of the building in a different light and formed the Plymouth Center Foundation Inc. to make the building available to the citizens of Plymouth. Through their persistent efforts, the contributions of local contractors, and countless hours of volunteer work the building became in 1995 what you now see.

### ***Restoration***

The essential external architecture has been retained; the interior of the building has been cleaned, renovated and brought up to code while retaining the flow and spirit of the 1930's. Some of the decorative arches in the show room are still in place some new ones added, and the rough stucco walls restored. In the former shop area the curvilinear motif has been recreated in the display walls. With its reopening, the building has become the home of Gallery 11 North, The Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, and the Plymouth Historical Society. But it will still be a place in which to grow- anew.

### ***Acknowledgements and References***

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