

constructed 1910

Kitzinger Building · 394 River Street

Architects – Ferry & Clays of Milwaukee

After the Engelmann Block was destroyed by fire in May of 1909, the owner of the building decided to rebuild the once extravagant structure that stood at the northeast corner of River and Maple streets. But while his initial plans were hastily put together, a change of heart by a local fraternal organization factored into the delayed opening of the new Engelmann Block for over two years. With the ruins of the former Engelmann Block still smoldering, Gus Kitzinger, son-in-law to locally renowned and deceased lumber baron Michael Englemann, informed the Manistee Daily News that once the insurance settlement had been adjusted, he would build a new structure on the same location as the previous building.



By early July of 1909, Kitzinger traveled to Milwaukee to go over rudimentary plans for a new building. Because the former Engelmann Block was such an extravagant, three-story superstructure that housed multiple businesses and offices as well as the Masonic Lodge on the third floor, Kitzinger decided to have the new building constructed in the same manner. With the local Masonic Lodge agreeing once more to house their quarters on the top floor of the building, a spring 1910 start was planned for the construction of the new Engelmann Block.

An article published in the Manistee Daily Advocate on April 15, 1910 provides a detailed description of the proposed new building: “Arrangements are about completed for the erection of the new Engelmann building, which Gus Kitzinger is to build soon on the Engelmann site where the Englemann Block and its annex burned the 10th of May last. The building will be three stories high above the grade with a two story basement below. The exterior will be of face brick.

“In general appearance it will look like the old structure but will be much larger, extending to the east to cover annex and the alley which formerly led to the dock. On the first floor there will be a double store at the corner, a stairway and single and double store in order named. From the Maple Street side there will be entrance to suit of rooms for the Olympian Club. The second floor will be divided into modern office rooms. The building is arranged so that the open area supplies light for the side offices and a skylight lights the middle store below.

“The entire third story is to be occupied by the Masons, the interior arrangements having been made to suit the needs of the societies. There will be two large rooms, the large room in the northwest part and the banquet hall in the northeast part, separated by an area way. The ante room, preparation room, armory, Red Cross room, library, card room, billiard room, ladies’ parlor, Eastern Star room, kitchen and service rooms make up the rest of the plan, for very convenient quarters. Over the lodge room the roof will be raised to permit of roof trusses so no large columns will be needed in the large hall.

“Ferry & Clays of Milwaukee are the architects. The plans are now in the hands of the contractors who will soon file their bids and it is desired that most of the construction work can be completed before winter.”

With a proclamation made and plans in hand, it was decided to get moving on the project as soon as possible, however the Masons decided to nix the plans on having their lodge housed on the third floor of the proposed new building. Instead they decided to construct their own quarters in the form of the Masonic Temple, which was to be located on Maple Street next to the library. Because the Masons decided to go out on their own, plans for the new Engelmann Block had to be altered. As the designs went back to the drawing board, Kitzinger and his architects decided to remove the third story and make the building a two-story structure with a less extravagant design. By the fall of 1910 work began on the construction on the new Engelmann Block. Brief details were published in the Manistee Daily Advocate on Oct. 25, 1910: “Workmen commenced today clearing away the debris at the Engelmann Block on the corner of Maple and River streets which was destroyed by fire May 9, 1909, and was put down in the records of Manistee as one of the most disastrous and expensive fires in many years. The new building, which will occupy the site will be two stories high and will have a frontage on River Street to the building now occupied by the American Express Co. and on Maple to River the first floor or ground floor will be arranged for four large store rooms, while the second floor will be partly arranged for office rooms and lodge rooms.”

In July of 1911 the new Engelmann Block was finally completed. 11 years later, a modern, clothing store set up shop inside the building and would remain a staple on River Street for over 60 years. The name of that clothing store was J.C. Penney.

Manistee Commercial Historic District – listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places