

---

---

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 16-03

### **Holzbeierlein Bakery**

1815-1827 Wiltberger Street NW  
Square 441, Lot 0853

Meeting Date: January 26, 2017  
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League  
Affected ANC: 6E  
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

---

---

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Holzbeierlein Bakery complex at 1815-1827 Wiltberger Street NW a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for listing at the local level of significance with a Period of Significance 1891-1930.



### **Architectural and Historic Background**

The Holzbeierlein Bakery, located between Wiltberger Street and Wiltberger Alley East in the block bounded by 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> and S and T Streets NW, consists of a complex of connected red brick commercial/industrial buildings constructed between 1891 and 1930. The various buildings are all associated with the bakery, and are all connected physically, filling the depth of the lots between Wiltberger Street and its parallel eastern alley. In addition, all of the buildings are vernacular structures with similar two-story massing and detailing limited to their particular uses. The complex principally includes an 1893 stable building on Wiltberger Alley discernible on the exterior by horse stall windows and a hayloft; an 1894 bakery abutting the stable on Wiltberger Alley; a 1913 bakery building fronting Wiltberger Street and extending back to an 1894 addition to the original 1891 bakery; a 1914 garage; and a 1930 addition that provided a two-story connection between the 1913 bakery and the 1914 garage on Wiltberger Street. The

original 1891 bakery has been encased by later additions and is no longer readily visible, though walls from this structure may survive within the interior of the complex.

The various buildings in the complex line the west side of the alley and the east side of Wiltberger Street, a one-block-long minor street that cuts north-south through the square. The 30-foot-wide street, laid out in 1857 when C.W. Wiltberger subdivided the square, developed as a residential street in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with several groups of modest row houses constructed along it. Several alleys, running both parallel and perpendicular to the central minor street were primarily service lanes with private stables, woodsheds, and other outbuildings, though modest dwellings also occupied the alleyways. By the turn-of-the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, the industrial character of the alleys had grown to include several bake ovens, a grain storage facility, and other buildings associated with the baking industry. Eventually, Holzbeierlein's and the competing Dorsch's White Cross Bakery businesses which were established in the alleys, expanded beyond the alleyways into Wiltberger Street (and in the case of Dorsch's, on to S Street). This expansion prompted the demolition of residential rowhouses in the interior of the square, though one group of seven dwellings still survives along Wiltberger Street, south of Holzbeierlein's bakery buildings.

Holzbeierlein's Bakery is located one block east of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, just south of the original city limits at Florida Avenue. As one of the oldest arterial north-south roads connecting the District to Maryland and an early streetcar route, 7<sup>th</sup> Street developed into an important commercial corridor. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, stores and small commercial buildings, many run by members of the German merchant community, lined the 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor from downtown as far north as today's Florida Avenue. The first bakery to be located at this northern end of the street opened in 1876 by a Bavarian-born baker/merchant who would later sell his business to fellow Bavarian Peter Dorsch who established the White Cross Bakery across Wiltberger Street from Holzbeierlein's Bakery. In 1891, John M. Reuth built the bake oven on Wiltberger Alley East, which he operated until his death in 1899 when Michael Holzbeierlein purchased it. Just a few years earlier, in 1895, Holzbeierlein, also Bavarian-born, had opened his own bakery in the square, at the rear of his house at 1849 7<sup>th</sup> Street, after having worked for several years as a foreman for the Charles Schneider Baking Company at 5<sup>th</sup> and I Streets downtown. After Holzbeierlein's 1899 purchase of Reuth's bake ovens on Wiltberger Alley, he transferred his business there, adding to it and expanding it over the next three decades before his children took over the business in the 1930s.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Progressive Era as food sanitation and machine-made vs. home-made food products were critical to success in the industry, Holzbeierlein's Bakery fared well. In 1909, along with other bakers, Michael Holzbeierlein showcased his bread-making machinery at the popular Pure Food Show, and even invited his customers to visit his bakery on Wiltberger Alley where "Cleanliness, Goodness and Order" prevailed. In 1908, he gutted the interior of the 1894 stable on the site and installed breadmaking machinery in it; in 1913, he hired local German architect Julius Wenig and built a new two-story bakery building to expand his operations; and in 1914, he built a garage to house his fleet of delivery trucks. Holzbeierlein Bakery survived war-related cost increases and a baker's strike of 1920. In 1928-29, Michael Holzbeierlein built two nearby apartment buildings that housed workers of his bakery, which during the early 1930s, consisted of 60 employees.

As a marker of its success, Holzbeierlein Bakery survived competition with several large-scale commercial bakeries for the entire first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to Dorsch's White Cross Bakery which had grown alongside Holzbeierlein's, two significantly larger bakeries, the Corby Baking Company and the General Baking Company (Bond Bread Factory) established themselves nearby at Georgia and Florida Avenues. Eventually, the competition proved too much, and in 1953, at a time when the baking industry was the city's largest processing industry, Holzbeierlein & Sons Bakery declared bankruptcy. Although the Holzbeierlein family blamed increased costs and strict D.C. laws, the reality was that the family-owned

business could no longer compete with the larger corporations. At that time of its dissolution, the bakery had 70 employees and 30 delivery trucks, still working out of the Wiltberger Street/Alley bakery complex.

### **Evaluation**

The Holzbeierlein Bakery at 1815-1827 Wiltberger Street NW meets D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events) and B (History) and National Register Criterion A for its association with events and patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage and development of the District of Columbia. In particular, as the oldest surviving bakery, the Holzbeierlein complex represents the rise of the baking industry in Washington, one of the most important industries in the city which is not traditionally recognized for its industrial heritage; and it is associated with the evolution of the city's alleyways where physical evidence of the historically mixed-use residential, commercial and semi-industrial character of the interior of the city's squares is no longer common.

The Holzbeierlein Bakery complex also meets D.C. Designation Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criterion C (Architecture) for embodying the distinguishing characteristics of building types and styles. In particular, the bakery complex provides a good example of a small-scale commercial/industrial building complex in the city. Based upon a 1991-1992 survey of the city's historic warehouses, the majority of the identified industrial buildings provided for the storage of goods, while a more limited number of surviving industrial buildings, like Holzbeierlein's, were associated with manufacturing and production (i.e. printing, baking, brewing, and building-related manufacturing such as brickmaking and ornamental ironworking). Holzbeierlein's stands out as one of these production-type commercial/industrial facilities. Although the Holzbeierlein Bakery lacks the architectural presence, clarity of building type, and artistic detailing of the White Cross Bakery and the Art Moderne styling of the General Baking Company's Bond Bread Factory, its utilitarian style and collection of parts are more generally indicative of historic commercial/industrial buildings in the city. Like Holzbeierlein's Bakery, the city's industrial buildings were typically vernacular structures that often grew physically, as they adapted to new and expanded functions.

Although the application contends that the bakery is representative of the work of architect Julius Wenig and that Wenig qualifies as a master architect, staff does not concur with these findings. Julius Wenig is incontrovertibly a well-known and prolific designer of a variety of buildings in the city; however, his work has not been shown to be of a caliber of design that rises above those of other designers of the period, nor has it been shown that Wenig, either through his design work or professional or civic activities, was particularly influential in his field. Further, many other examples of Wenig's work better illustrate his talent as an architect. Still, it should be noted that many of Wenig's buildings, especially industrial ones, have been demolished or significantly altered in recent decades, and that Holzbeierlein's survives as a good example of an increasingly rare industrial-type building in the city that also happens to have been designed by Wenig.

The Period of Significance for the Holzbeierlein Bakery extends from 1891 when the first bake ovens were built on the site until 1930, the date of the last bakery-related addition to the complex. While the buildings making up the complex have seen further modifications since the end of the period of significance, namely the filling in of window and door openings on the exterior, and the removal of bakery-related equipment on the interior, these modifications have not altered the overall scale, massing and vernacular industrial character, or materials of the building complex. The building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, feeling and association and sufficient time has lapsed to adequately evaluate the building in its context.