

Certified Local Government
Grant Completion Report
Staff Support - Intern
1987-1988

City of Evanston
Preservation Commission
December, 1988

Gwen Sommers Yant
Preservation Coordinator

COMING OF AGE IN THE TWENTIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHWEST EVANSTON
IN THE FIRST THIRD OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Anne O. Earle

Theme. Time Period. Geographic Limits

The proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District is an area of owner-occupied single-family houses built during the first third of the twentieth century (Fig. 7). Eighty per cent of approximately 680 houses within the proposed district were constructed during the building boom between World War I and the early years of the Great Depression. The establishment of the new residential community at the edge of a nineteenth century suburb began in 1895, when a complementary trio of houses was built on an undeveloped block at the edge of North Evanston. Prairie Style houses, the most architecturally significant within the proposed district, and derivative foursquares followed. The large Prairie Style houses on large Lincoln Street lots set the tone for future development of the district. But it is the twenties houses that give the proposed district its dominant character. Various revival style houses and bungalows, houses designed by local architects, contractor houses, and a few mail order houses illustrate the variety of houses built for people with a wide range of incomes.

The proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District extends more than a half mile from north to south and about a mile from east to west and encompasses an area about three-eighths of a square mile (Fig. 8). Age, integrity and uniformity of setbacks distinguish the proposed district from the surrounding area. Most houses north and south of the proposed district were built about 1940 or after World War II. Many houses east and west of the proposed district have poor integrity and lack uniform setbacks. Volume and concentration of period resources distinguish the proposed district from other areas of Evanston. Within the district, nearly all the houses on many blocks were built within three to six years of each other. In contrast, in the Evanston Lakeshore Historic District and in the Evanston Ridge Historic District, Prairie Style houses were built next to Queen Anne and Italianate houses, and twenties houses were built as infill or to replace older houses. Groups of twenties houses in other areas of Evanston are found in smaller numbers and less variety than within the proposed district.

Historic Context

The proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District lies southwest of and adjacent to the original village of North Evanston (Fig. 9). North Evanston was platted in 1868 around the North Western Railway tracks at Central Street. A mile to the southeast was the Town of Evanston, which had been platted in 1854 and incorporated in 1863. In 1872 Evanston annexed the lakefront area to the east of North Evanston, and in 1873

Evanston began construction of waterworks on its northern lakeshore. In 1874 North Evanston and the eastern part of the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District were annexed to Evanston in order to get pure water.

The eastern part of the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District east of McDaniel Avenue had been subdivided in 1873. The area east of Ewing Avenue and south of Colfax was platted in 1874 and 1875. But despite subdivision and platting, the areas remained undeveloped for another two decades, and the southeastern portion of the proposed district had few houses until the late twenties. Construction of houses in the northeastern arm, however, began in 1894 and was quite active in the first decade of this century. Lincolnwood Subdivision, which includes both sides of Lincoln and the north side of Colfax between McDaniel and Ewing avenues, was platted in 1909. The first house in the subdivision was built the following year, and others soon followed.

The block of Lincoln west of Ewing Avenue was subdivided in 1914. The following year a ten-block area in the western part of the proposed district was subdivided. In 1916 all the land west of present-day Lincolnwood Drive and Forestview Road was annexed to Evanston. By the end of 1917 most of the proposed district west of Ewing Avenue and north of Grant had been subdivided, but only eight houses had been built on scattered lots. Between 1921 and 1927 most of the proposed district west of Ewing Avenue and south of Grant was subdivided. Development followed subdivision, generally extending from north to south. By the onset of the Depression in 1929, most of the houses and the only church (Northminster Presbyterian) within the proposed district had been built. The majority of houses had been constructed between 1925 and 1929, and the area was nearly fully built up.

Most of the houses east of Ewing Avenue face north or south, reflecting the pattern of streets laid out in the 1870s as an extension of the village of North Evanston. Most of the houses west of Ewing Avenue face east or west, a consequence of twentieth century platting that reflects nineteenth century land ownership patterns of the once wooded area.

Numerous oaks, especially on Marcy Avenue and in Quinlan Park, are reminders that oak trees abounded in the area before it was developed. Elm trees planted on the parkways at the time of development still arch gracefully over a number of streets within the district. The unusually large number of surviving elms add another dimension to the district's high level of integrity.

Property types

Eighty per cent of the houses within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District were built between 1918

and 1931; most of those houses are brick, but a number of houses are stone, stucco, wood and combinations thereof. Eight per cent of the houses within the proposed district were built before World War I; most are frame or stucco. They are clustered in the eastern arm of the district. Prairie Style houses designed by nationally known architects and contractor foursquares are represented. Only four houses within the proposed district were built in the 1890s. Less than five per cent of the houses are post-World War II infill.

The earliest house within the proposed district was built in 1894 at 2315 Lincoln by a North Evanston real estate developer who lived a block away (outside district). In 1895 the three houses around the corner at 2444, 2450 and 2454 Pioneer Road were designed as an ensemble by Robert C. Spencer, Jr., for Evanston developer Charles Wightman. That trio of houses illustrates the origin of the dominant pattern of development in the proposed district: nearly simultaneous construction of similar houses on adjacent lots. That development pattern persisted into the early years of the Depression. In contrast, the usual pattern of single-family residential construction elsewhere in Evanston prior to World War II was to build two or three houses per block, leaving vacant lots between for later infill. Harrison and Lincoln streets immediately east of the proposed district boundaries illustrate that multigenerational pattern of development.

The eight houses within the district on Pioneer Road south of Quinlan Park were built between 1908 and 1911. Their construction on adjacent lots within a short time span is characteristic of development within the proposed district. Building permits name contractor John Anderson, who lived two blocks away (outside district), as owner and architect of the group of three houses at 2401, 2407 and 2415 Pioneer Road, which were built in 1908. Evanston carpenter-contractor Thomas B. Carson is listed as owner and architect of the houses at 2341, 2410 and 2414 Pioneer Road, which were built in 1910. But permits for the houses at 2402 and 2406 Pioneer Road that Carson built the following year name Evanstonian Harvey Wright as architect.

The most architecturally significant houses within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District are the Prairie Style houses on Lincoln Street. They were built before World War I and most are stucco and frame, unlike the majority of houses within the proposed district. The Prairie houses set far back on generous landscaped lots set the tone for the later development of Lincoln Street. Although not, for the most part, built on adjacent lots, the Prairie houses stand comfortably next to houses of later generations; but there are usually only two generations of houses per block. Many of the Prairie houses were designed by nationally known architects. Dwight Perkins lived in a 1904 house of his design at 2319 Lincoln Street; it is listed on the National Register. Five

other houses at 2212, 2333, 2401, 2610 and 2700 Lincoln were designed by Perkins & Hamilton or Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton between 1906 and 1912. Tallmadge & Watson designed the two houses at 2222 and 2200 Lincoln in 1909 and 1910 respectively. Alfred Alschuler designed the house at 2201 Lincoln, which was built in 1908. Pond & Pond designed the house at 2706 Lincoln in 1910. Charles R. Ayars, a local Prairie architect, lived at 2419 Lincoln in a house built in 1904; he also designed the house at 2525 Lincoln in 1910. One distinctive late Prairie house designed by George Elmslie was built at 2700 Grant Street in 1922.

The dominant character of the district, however, is formed by the ensemble of houses constructed during the building boom between the end of World War I and the early years of the Depression. Although each house is different from its neighbors, a feeling of cohesiveness unites the proposed district. The core of the district is the seven block area of twenties houses that lies between Grant and Harrison streets on Ewing Avenue, Forestview Road, Lincolnwood Drive, Central Park Avenue, Marcy Avenue, and part of Lawndale Avenue. Large revival houses designed by local architects for original owner-occupants are interspersed with equally large revival houses built by contractor-builders for speculation.

Somewhat smaller revival houses interspersed with large bungalows line the nearby streets. Groups of contractor houses and smaller bungalows are at the south and west periphery. As one moves outward from the core of the proposed district, the tree-lined parkways become shallower, the lots narrower, and the setbacks less deep. But the transition from street to street is quite gradual. Most houses on a block have uniform setbacks, are similar in size, scale and massing to their neighbors on either side, and face similar houses across the street.

Two broad streets, Lincoln Street and Central Park Avenue, lead to the core of the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. Each has 100 foot wide right-of-way and very broad parkways. Large houses with generous setbacks on wide landscaped lots contribute to the feeling of graciousness and gentility.

Lincoln Street is an extension of a street laid out in the platting of North Evanston in 1868. Lincoln was, and remains, the major entrance to the district from the east. Though a broad thoroughfare from the Chicago & North Western Railway tracks to its western terminus at Lincolnwood Avenue, Lincoln Street changes character abruptly at Hartrey Avenue, the eastern edge of the district and the western boundary of the original Village of North Evanston. Within the district, lot sizes, prevailing setbacks and house sizes on Lincoln are significantly larger than to the east. Within the proposed district, the houses on Lincoln reflect the successive stages

of development from the dominance of Prairie houses near Hartrey Avenue to the dominance of eclectic styles near Lincolnwood Drive.

The ambience of the core of the district extends along Central Park Avenue south of Grant. This is not surprising since the developer who had subdivided Lincolnwood Avenue north of Grant in 1921 laid out the southern two blocks of Central Park Avenue in 1923 and 1927. Clearly Central Park Avenue was planned to be, and remains, the principal entrance to Northwest Evanston from Simpson Street/Golf Road, the boundary between Evanston and Skokie. Golf Road is now a major thoroughfare to communities west of Evanston, but at the time Central Park Avenue was laid out, Golf was a narrow two-lane road built on a section line. Across the road in Skokie (then called Niles Center) was farmland. The houses on Central Park Avenue are large and reflect the eclecticism of the late twenties when they were built.

Payne Street and Normandy Place west of Central Park Avenue at the southwest corner of the proposed district are visual extensions of Central Park Avenue; they were laid out by the same developer. Normandy Place is a discontinuous extension of Noyes Street and is the only street within the proposed district that does not extend beyond the district boundaries. Construction on Payne and Normandy was begun in 1927 and continued into the early years of the Depression. A number of the houses were built by C. A. Hemphill, a prominent North Shore developer. The result is a particularly homogeneous group of houses. Some of the Hemphill houses were built for specific clients, and others were built on spec; all are designed by the same group of architects and generally are derivatives of prevailing revival styles.

Small twenties houses on narrow lots are found in the western part of the proposed district on Lawndale Avenue north of Colfax Street and on Ridgeway Avenue. A row of six rather unusual 1926 bungalows anchors the corner of the district at Ridgeway Avenue and Grant Street.

Another area of modest houses is south of Grant Street on Lincolnwood Drive, Forestview and Ewing avenues. The west side of Forestview Avenue in the block between Simpson and Payne contains a group of eleven brick bungalows built in 1925. Behind them on Payne are five similar bungalows built the following year. Although basically the same plan, variations in entrance design, window shapes and roofline give each bungalow an individual identity within a unified whole. Across the street on the east side of Forestview Avenue lies one of the few frame bungalows within the proposed district. Although numerous frame bungalows were built in the southeast part of Northwest Evanston, most have been so extensively and insensitively altered that little of the original structure

remains visible, and they have been excluded from the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District.

Although most blocks of houses within the proposed district face other houses, a few look onto parks or open space. The houses on Cowper and Hastings avenues face each other across the greensward of Horace E. Bent Park. The houses in the 2700 blocks of Colfax and Grant and the 2300 block of Ewing Avenue face the Dwight Perkins Woods Forest Preserve. A group of houses on Lincoln Street and Pioneer Road acknowledge triangular Quinlan Park. Since 1949 most of the houses in the 2600 block of Colfax have faced the present Lincolnwood Elementary School building; prior to that, most faced undeveloped land behind the original 1913 school building, which fronted on McDaniel Avenue. Houses in the 2500 block of Colfax originally faced open space surrounding the 1909 Swedish Retirement Association building; the latter is excluded from the proposed district because its view from within the district is obliterated by a larger 1978 building that faces Colfax.

The two parks and the forest preserve within the proposed district became public lands during the period of significance of the proposed district. Triangular Quinlan Park, laid out in 1873 as part of an eight block subdivision, is the nineteenth century result of superimposing a rectangular street grid on an earlier diagonal road. The triangular area, 200 feet on a side, was never divided into lots. The land was bought for a park in 1906 and named for an Evanston realtor prior to 1922.

Both Bent Park and Perkins Woods had been divided into lots when originally platted in 1915 and 1874 respectively, but neither was ever developed. Local citizens, desiring more open space, created a local park district, which in 1925 or 1926 purchased most of the land that is now Bent Park. (The rest was purchased in 1951 and 1952.) Four years later the park was named for Horace E. Bent, a real estate developer and leader in the North End Improvement Association. After Evanston voters rejected a bond issue to purchase the wooded tract that is now Perkins Woods, architect Dwight Perkins persuaded the Cook County Forest Preserve District to purchase the land in 1917 or 1918. Dwight Perkins Woods Forest Preserve is a square block of virgin timber, the only remnant of the Big Woods of pioneer days that once extended west of present-day East Prairie Road in neighboring Skokie and west of present-day McDaniel Avenue and Pioneer Road in Evanston. Architect Dwight Perkins, who lived in the house at 2319 Lincoln Street, was instrumental in lobbying for state legislation to create forest preserves.

The present Lincolnwood School building was built in 1949 to replace the original 1913 school whose foundation was beyond repair. The school is included within the proposed

Northwest Evanston Historic District for historical reasons: construction of the original Lincolnwood School building enhanced the attractiveness of the area to families with children and thereby encouraged rapid development of the surrounding area including the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. Furthermore, Lincolnwood School was a center for community activities during much of the period of significance of the district.

Age and integrity determine the boundaries of the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. Most of the boundaries are drawn along alleys or rear lot lines. A boundary drawn along a side or front lot line generally excludes houses considerably newer than those within the proposed district. Most houses within the proposed district have relatively few visible alterations; but many houses east and west of the proposed district have been altered to such an extent that the original design is nearly totally hidden or destroyed. However some of the houses on Harrison and Lincoln streets east of the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District should be considered for inclusion in a future North Evanston Historic District.

Original building permits have been found for 98% of the houses within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. But transcription of the permit data (except construction dates) for most buildings built after 1915 and analysis of that data remains to be done. cursory examination shows a number of post-World War I houses designed by prolific local architects: Lyman J. Allison, S. S. Beman (Jr.), Edgar O. Blake, Joseph Bristle, B. J. Bruns, H. H. Green, Arthur Howell Knox, Anthony Quitsov, Robert Rae, Meyer J. Sturm, Bertha Y. Whitman, and others. Developer C. A. Hemphill, founder of a firm that has built large houses on the North Shore for three generations, built a number of houses within the proposed district during the late twenties and early thirties. The architect(s) named for most northwest Evanston Hemphill houses are generally Houlihan, Hauser & Marks together or separately. Drake Bros., for whom architect Trent E. Sanford designed houses, built a number of houses within the proposed district. Other contractors' names, such as Evanstonian W. S. Williams, who built a number of brick bungalows within the district, are not as familiar. Further research is needed to determine the significance of many of the architects and builders.

Fifty-two houses within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District are designated Evanston Landmarks (Fig. 10); twenty-one of those are also listed on the 1972 Illinois Historic Structures Survey.

Stylistic classification and analysis of the variety of eclectic houses within the district needs to be done. Likewise the bungalows should be classified and analyzed.

Local newspapers of the twenties should be skimmed for information about the impact of the 1921 zoning ordinance on construction and about development of the then-new subdivisions in northwest Evanston.

It would be interesting to know whether most of the original owner-occupants of houses within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District moved from elsewhere in Evanston or from other municipalities. Examination of city directories should also yield information about who the residents were and what they did. Scattered data shows that corporate executives, architects, schoolteachers, and blue collar workers lived in houses within the proposed district.

About half of the single-family houses within the proposed district have free-standing garages. Most of the others have attached garages. The role of public transportation and automobile ownership on the development of the proposed district needs to be investigated.

The availability of permit data for nearly all the buildings within the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District and reverse listings (by address) in city directories ensure a wealth of accessible material. But the large size of the proposed district and relative unfamiliarity with eclectic architectural styles and local people in the twenties makes a more detailed study of the proposed district a long-term project.

Conclusion

The proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District merits further investigation and application for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As explained in the preceding essay, the proposed district possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling. It also meets National Register Criterion C in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type (single family houses) and period (from 1895 to 1937); it represents the work of several master architects; it possesses high artistic value; and it represents a significant and distinguishable entity, although some of the individual components may lack individual distinction.

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