

RIDGELAND-OAK PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT

National Register of Historic Places
Nomination Form

Prepared by:
Daniel M. Bluestone and the
Oak Park Landmarks Commission
(now Historic Preservation Commission)

December 8, 1983

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

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Section 7: DESCRIPTION

Summary Statement

Residential structures and a fairly spacious suburban character dominate the District's 539 acres and 1,653 buildings. Spanning the decades from the 1870s to the 1920s, the District's residential architecture embodies a myriad of building styles and types. The major re-orientation of domestic architecture embodied in the District, from 19th century eclecticism to 20th century modernism, was accompanied by a growing use of stucco in the place of wood in house exteriors. The spacious character of the single-family house lots is enhanced by wide parkway lawns between the street and the sidewalks. The streets are laid out in a grid pattern. The District's single-family residence areas are bounded by streets lined with brick apartment buildings. Rising from two to four stories, the apartments were built for the most part between 1905 and 1929. An important physical aspect of the District is its alternating quality between busy apartment-lined streets and quiet single-family areas. The District also includes many of Oak Park's finest religious and commercial buildings, ranging in style from Romanesque to Prairie School modern. The overall integrity and historic character of the District has been well preserved.

Geography

The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District occupies a flat plain of glacial till lying nine miles west of Lake Michigan and downtown Chicago. The nearly level natural setting is broken only by a low terminal moraine rising slightly under the course of Lake Street in the western part of the District. The area's geography, perhaps, an inspiration of the creative designs of Prairie School architects, provided no real obstacle to human settlement. Artesian wells, railroad transportation and Chicago's booming growth facilitated the area's emergence in the late-19th century as a major residential suburb.

Residential Architecture

The numerous detached, single-family residences built in the district prior to 1900 were constructed primarily of wood and are generally 2 to 2-1/2 stories; these include several fine examples of Gothic Revival cottages and Italianate houses from the 1870s and 1880s. Exuberant and spatially complex Stick Style and Queen Anne frame houses from the 1880s and 1890s line many of the streets. These fine examples of Victorian homes are located throughout the district; in general, both in terms of number and quality, the highest concentration of these homes were built along the streets west of East Avenue. A few distinctive houses incorporating Romanesque motifs in their street facades were built in the District in the 1890s.

Around 1900, as the population and settled area of the District rapidly expanded, many of the new single-family detached homes assumed new forms and materials. Eschewing the earlier

designs which incorporated historically-derived style and ornament and turning to the rooted principles and traditions of composition, proportion and symmetry, architects and builders helped effect a major stylistic transition. The District, containing Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, lacks examples of his own mature Prairie School residential designs which are found in abundance in the Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School of Architecture Historic District adopted in 1972. However, the District does bear the unmistakable imprint of the Prairie School's modern architecture in its post-1900 houses. Around 1900 many Prairie School architects, and builders who popularized their work, began filling the area with simple, quiet, formal rectangular houses with more symmetrical disposition of parts, than had characterized the late Victorian homes. While a few brick homes were constructed, the more common use of light colored stucco to cover either part or all of the house's exterior wall surface marked a transition in building material and texture as striking as the stylistic re-orientation.

The modern residential buildings in the District tended to preserve the 2 and 2-1/2 story plan of earlier residences; yet, it did, in some cases, accommodate different building forms. Promoted primarily by the Oak Park builder R. G. Hancock, some modest 1-1/2 story, stucco, California-style bungalows (such as those along the 300 block of North Taylor Avenue built in 1913) did appear in the District. They represented an extreme in the simplifying tendencies of modern design. More importantly, maintaining the same over-all exterior form of the modern stucco single-family residence, the two-flat, double decker, detached residence appeared in the District after 1900. Cleverly designed and disguised as a single-family home, the two-flat apartment settled harmoniously and, in many cases, unnoticed into blocks of single-family residences. The detached single-family and two-family houses generally occupy the center of rectangular lots with 50-foot street frontages and depths of from 150 feet to 175 feet.



300 block of North Taylor Avenue

The numerous apartment buildings constructed in the District between 1905 and 1929 tempered but did not destroy its pervasive suburban character. The apartment buildings are between 2 and 4 stories. Ranging in color from white, to yellow, to red, to brown, the apartment buildings are nearly all constructed of brick. In seeking a harmonious suburban landscape, many builders and architects included in their apartment building designs a variety of elements from porches, sun rooms, bay windows, half-timbering, casement windows, and geometrical ornament. Features of the then modern prairie School architecture were introduced into some of the apartment buildings. As the District's residential lots filled up in the 1910s, construction of detached residences declined precipitously. However, the 1920s apartment construction proceeded and even intensified. Replacing earlier single-family houses, the apartment buildings quite often

constituted a second generation of building on their sites. Larger apartment buildings with several separate entrances arranged along or around landscaped courtyards developed between about 1915 and 1929. The 1920s buildings continued to incorporate contemporary stylistic elements from domestic architecture. Thus, while the detached residences do not reflect the general return to stylistic revivalism, the District’s apartment houses of the 1920s contain surface ornaments characteristic of Tudor, Medieval, and Classical architecture.



Apartment buildings in the Historic District.

Civic, Religious and Commercial Buildings

Suburban residents often looked beyond their residential structures for a sense of neighborhood and community. Civic, religious, and commercial buildings occupied visible and central spots in the suburban landscape. The District encompasses major examples of these buildings.

The District’s ecclesiastical architecture includes numerous architectural styles and building materials. The church buildings range from W. C. Williamson’s First Presbyterian (now Calvary) Church (1898-1902) built in the Romanesque style of variously colored, split, granite boulders to Frost & Granger’s Cuyler Avenue Methodist Church (1903-1914) built in English Gothic style of red granite, to Henry Schlack’s St. Edmund’s Church (1909-1910) built in French Gothic of Bedford limestone to Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous Unity Temple (1905-1908) built in bold modern style of reinforced concrete. The District’s religious school buildings complement the churches. The public schools, Eben E. Robert’s imposing Classical Revival Municipal Building (1903-1904), and the imposing Moderne post office designed by White & Weber (1931) represent the Community’s civic and secular commitments to good government and public education.



First Presbyterian

Cuyler Methodist

St. Edmund’s

Unity Temple

Unlike the churches, which are located on corner lots in both the business and residential sections of the District, the significant commercial structures are located primarily in concentrated nodes, determined initially by accessibility to the railroad stations along the Chicago and Northwestern Railway. Built between 1890 and 1929, the major commercial

buildings are constructed of brick and stone and are from two to four stories. They follow a general plan of combining commercial/retail stores on the first floor with office and/or apartment space above. The outstanding exception to the pattern is Roy Hotchkiss' 10-story design for the Medical Arts Building (1929), faced in white concrete and green terra cotta. The District's significant commercial structures, like the churches, present broad stylistic variety. William J. Van Keuren's S. S. Niles Building (1890-1894), designed for a bank and stores below and offices and flats above, adopted restrained Romanesque motifs and juxtaposed brick with heavy stone lintels and carved stone ornament. Patton & Fisher's Cicero Gas Company building (1893), along the District's major commercial street, Oak Park Avenue, merged Romanesque arches at street level with a gable, a corner tower, and brackets familiar in the Queen Anne designs of their Oak Park residential work. Patton, Fisher and Miller's design for the Scoville Block (1899), a building combining commercial, offices and sleeping rooms, was topped with a pitched terra cotta tile roof and a dramatic series of stepped Dutch gables. Eben E. Robert's design for the Second Scoville Building (1907-1908), listed on the National Register, contained stores, offices and a Masonic Hall in the general form and massing familiar to the Prairie School; T. R. Bishop's design for a two-story enameled brick commercial block, rimmed with foliated trim (1922) at 200-212 South Marion also extended modern design and style to Oak Park's commercial architecture.



Medical Arts Niles Building Cicero Gas Scoville Block Second Scoville

Lawns, Parkways and the Streetscape

The significance of the Historic District hinges not only on its individual structures but on the orderly integration of its diverse building types and styles into a fairly harmonious suburban plan. Despite the diversity of building types, the ordered relation of buildings to each other and to the framework of the streetscape fosters a striking harmony.

The subdivision of land, the platting of streets and the sale of building lots in the District proceeded according to the grid system corresponding to the 1785 United States rectangular survey of townships and sections. In the nearby western suburb of Riverside, roughly contemporary with Oak Park and Ridgeland, the corporate control of 1,600 acres of land permitted Olmsted and Vaux to lay out a curvilinear plan to set the community apart from the city and its grid plan. In contrast, developers in Oak Park and Ridgeland relied on the traditional and more familiar grid plan to coordinate the settlement of much smaller land holdings over the course of the years. Thus, the suburban community intended to arise as linked but distinct part of the city, replicated the city's dominant land division. In 1892, changing the names of several east-west streets to correspond with the names of the main connecting Chicago streets, Oak Park and Ridgeland became even more closely identified with the Chicago grid.

Despite the repetition of Chicago's grid and street names, the spacious right-of-ways and broad parkway lawns in the District successfully create a more suburban residential character. Two standard rights-of-way (the total distance between opposite lot-lines) prevail in the District. All east-west streets and the north-south streets located west of Oak Park Avenue have 66-foot rights-of-way. The District's other rights-of-way are 80 feet in width. After dedicating a 30-foot wide strip for actual street paving and two 5-foot wide cement sidewalks, space remained for generous parkway lawns, between the sidewalk and the street, which range from 12 to 20 feet. These landscaped parkways arose with the earliest subdivisions and prevailed into the 20th century. The only modifications came when the widths of Wisconsin, Oak Park, Ridgeland Avenues and Washington Boulevard were widened to 38 feet – removing 4 feet from each parkway.

The District's street light design supports the continuity of the streetscape created by the parkway plan. Replacing earlier arc lights and overhead wires, the present light standards and lanterns were installed in 1926 and 1927. The wires are placed in underground culverts. The octagonal cast-bronze lanterns, 32 inches high and 16 inches in diameter, topped with ornamental finials, are supported by gray reinforced concrete standards, 13 feet high. The lights are from 120 to 150 feet apart and are arranged in a staggered configuration on opposite sides of the streets. The busier east-west streets: South, Pleasant, Randolph, Washington, as well as Ridgeland, Oak Park and Austin, have newer 30-foot high concrete poles with 8-foot steel arms.

The Elevated Track

The 1907 elevation above grade of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway tracks, located between North and South Boulevard, created a continuous, lofty presence in Oak Park and the District. The track looms especially large in the otherwise level landscape. The concrete retaining wall is incised with shallow arcaded motif. It terminates the northward view along most of the District's north-south streets. The elevated track, despite its numerous underpasses, does interrupt Oak Park's architectural landscape and provides an obvious boundary for the Historic District. The District extends north of the elevated track at Oak Park Avenue and between Cuyler and Harvey Avenues. In both places, higher structures on the north side of the tracks, provide some continuity between separate sections of the District. Since 1962, the elevated track, has accommodated the Lake Street elevated (Chicago Transit Authority) track which earlier ran at grade along South Boulevard.

Although concerns for public safety and operating efficiency, rather than aesthetics or symbolism, determined the track elevation, the project gave the railroad a visual dominance in Oak Park, which symbolized its central role in the area's development as a commuting suburb of Chicago. The determining force of railway transport in early community growth is architecturally recalled in the car barns and power plant of the Cicero and Proviso Street Railway Co. (1892 – presently used as the garage of the West Town Bus Company) and in Lake Street Elevated transformer building at 117 South Lombard (1903 – presently used as a residence and artist studio).

Building Sites and Connections: The District's Order

The relation of buildings to each other and to the spacious framework embodied in the street plan also fosters a certain harmony and unity in the District plan. Detached residences from all

periods generally were constructed 30 to 50 feet back from the front lot line on green lawns, which nicely complement and extend the parkway lawns. The depth of the lots in relation to the size of the houses made it easy for house builders to observe a fairly uniform building line. In a lot pattern of development on easy access to the railway, the less generous width of lots provided for a desirable level of concentration and gave 15 to 20 feet of separation between adjacent houses. The stables, garages, and alleys at the rear of the lots, generally eliminated the need to break up parkway strips and side yards with driveways.

The District's larger apartment buildings occupy a greater percentage of their lots than the detached residences do. In some cases, the apartment building observes the building line of adjacent detached residences. More commonly, the apartment buildings have smaller lawn areas between the wall and the lot line. The largest apartment buildings have wings close to the lot line and yet often incorporate lawns, plants, and trees into their midst with landscaped courtyards. The parkways and lawns complement the domestic references of the architecture itself to distinguish many of these apartment buildings from the lot line walls and greater formality of their more urban counterparts.

The most striking feature of the District's streetscape and the relation of the buildings to each other is their relative order, achieved through a zoning system of districting. The District's business and apartment buildings are not randomly scattered among detached residences. In a planned order codified by the 1921 Zoning Ordinance, certain streets are set aside for apartment houses, and others for detached residences. The subsequent concentration of large apartment buildings initiated rather striking contrasts in the District's streetscape. In several areas of the district turning a corner leads one from a corridor of bustling, high-density apartments into the midst of a quiet, suburban domestic street. The alternating character, and balance, of apartment or business corridors and suburban streets is highly unusual and quite successfully achieved in the District.

Boundaries and Containers

The District can be conceptualized as a container – broad areas of detached residences are contained and surrounded by narrower strips given over largely to apartment buildings. On the west, apartments line Maple Avenue and to a lesser extent Wisconsin Avenue. On the south, apartment buildings line Washington Boulevard creating a strong boundary nearly as consistent and visible as the elevated track embankment at South Boulevard, which contains a large part of the District on the North. On the east, Austin Boulevard's line of apartments, share a continuity of form, style and fabric with Washington Boulevard. In the section of Ridgeland north of the elevated track, the Austin Boulevard line of apartments is backed by the apartments along North Humphrey Avenue. Commercial and apartment buildings along South Oak Park Avenue present a narrow break in the detached residential areas which these other apartment-lined streets generally enclose.

Given the vagaries of town development, the concept of the District as a container provides a useful but somewhat idealized generalization. First, there are apartment buildings located in other sections of the district, among detached residences; they are only concentrated at the periphery of the District. Second, the Maple, Washington, Austin corridors are not built-up solidly with large apartment buildings; there is a mixture of small detached residences along

these streets. Finally, there are detached residences, both singly and in groups, of fairly high quality, which are adjacent to, but not contained by the zoning envelope's apartment boundaries. For example, the historic district boundaries are drawn to include John S. Van Bergen's W. H. Griffith House (1913, 418 South Harvey), Frank Lloyd Wright's G. W. Smith House (1895-1898, 404 Home Avenue), Charles E. White's C. W. Austin House (1905, 420 Clinton Avenue) and Eben E. Robert's F. W. Hall House (1904-5, 412 Clinton) all of which are located south of the Washington Boulevard corridor. The southern boundary thus often dips below the Washington Boulevard line to take in certain blocks of detached residence; it is pulled back to the Boulevard at other points to exclude many more recent apartments of a quite intrusive character. Similarly, the section of Ridgeland north of the elevated track encompasses several Gothic cottages and noteworthy blocks of stucco residences but lacks the articulated, contained boundary of the main body of the district.



Outside the boundary, in portions of the District, sharp discontinuity in building style and type is evident. The section of Forest Park west of Harlem Avenue and the District's west boundary lacks the Victorian architecture of the Oak Park section and has none of the orderly integration of detached residences and apartments characterizing the Historic District. Harlem Avenue, itself lined with automotive service and fast food establishments, presents a quiet distinct boundary to the west. Madison Street, the first street south of the south boundary of the district, constitutes a similarly abrupt change in building type and landscape plan. This street is a major vehicular transportation artery from Chicago, 120 feet wide, and is bordered for much of its length by an automotive strip lacking any architectural merit (even as far as automotive strips go). The residential areas south of Madison Street consist primarily of single-family detached houses occupying smaller lots. There are a number of fine streetscapes in this area, such as the Hulbert-built section on Clinton and Kenilworth Avenues, but the overall quality of architecture is somewhat less than that of the Historic District. This is also the case with the northern boundary north of Superior Street and Chicago Avenue. A major pedestrian mall has mauled and compromised the historic character of the Lake and Marion Streets business center, adjacent to the western section of the district. In this area, parking lots, concrete and gray granite pavers, the modern light standards, and the clumps of landscape more closely resemble an enclosed shopping mall than the historic character of the commercial buildings and streets included in the District.

The District boundaries north of Lake Street, west of North Cuyler Avenue, and east of Austin Boulevard do not outline areas of sharp discontinuity or distinction between the landscape inside and outside of the District. Rather they define the borders of an existing and of an anticipated historic district. North of Lake Street and west of North Cuyler and North Ridgeland Avenues, the Historic District is in close proximity to the National Register's *Frank Lloyd Wright and*

Prairie School of Architecture Historic District. This area encompasses a wealthier residential district. It contains some Victorian and modern homes of higher architectural merit than those in the Historic District; nevertheless, the continuities of form and association are manifest. Zoned as a detached residence district, the already established Oak Park Historic District lacks the alternating character of city and suburb, town and country, and the range of building forms and types which exist in the Historic District reviewed here.

It is anticipated that a portion of the Austin neighborhood of Chicago, located just east of Austin Boulevard, will soon be formally presented as an historic district. It contains significant architectural and historical associations with the District's Ridgeland and Oak Park area. These areas developed simultaneously as Western Suburbs of Chicago. Contiguous sites and the Chicago and Northwestern Railway tracks united them physically. Politically, they were merged and incorporated in Cicero Township until 1899. Builders, community leaders, and architects; for example, F. A. Hill, Henry Austin, and Frederick Schock worked on both sides of Austin Boulevard, which in 1902, became Oak Park's eastern boundary. William Drummond's First Congregational Church of Austin (1904-08, corner of Midway Park and Waller) shares stylistic similarities with Wright's Unity Temple. Many of the extraordinarily fine late-nineteenth-century detached houses lining Midway Park, Race, and Ohio Streets and Central Avenue echo the Victorian structures located within the Historic District. Similar structures are also located south of the elevated track; however, here the streets of Austin evidence a more random, less ordered juxtaposition of detached residences and apartment structures than is found in the Historic District, west of Austin Boulevard. The Midway Gardens Apartments, 440 North Austin, the West Suburban Hospital, and other associations, structures, and areas of the Historic District will harmoniously connect into the anticipated Austin historic district east of the Austin Boulevard boundary.



Midway Gardens, 440 N. Austin



West Suburban Hospital

Representation in Surveys

A total of 141 buildings in the District are listed in one or more of the following architectural surveys: National Register of Historic Places (4); Illinois Historic Structures Survey (41); Hasbrouck-Sprague Survey (76); Steiner: Victorian Oak Park (13); Sprague: Prairie School Oak Park (7).

Intrusive and Noncontributing Structures

The District's structures retain a very high degree of their original design and character. In general, they are in a good state of repair with few intrusive alterations or additions evident on the exterior. Where such intrusions or damaged integrity exists, it usually takes the form of

asbestos or aluminum siding. However, even with changed siding, the houses' massing and preservation of the streetscape make them contributing structures. The District includes no known or significant archeological sites. Structures considered to non-contributing intrusions are generally located on the periphery of the District, and where possible, have been excluded by the configuration of the boundary. Intrusive structures within the district are not ones which have been altered but ones which have been designed in the last thirty-five years in a style and material quite out of context with the District's earlier buildings. These intrusions are for the most part recently constructed apartment buildings and convenience stores. In 1930, the District was solidly built-up and utilized as it is today; the limited number of intrusive structures are ones which depart from the architectural patterns established in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when the District took on its present form and significance.

Section 8: SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement

Architecture and community planning are the Historic District's leading areas of significance. Ranging in date from the 1870s to the 1920s, the District encompasses models of suburban residential architecture, which possess high merit and quality. The District significantly embodies the major stylistic reorientation of domestic architecture from nineteenth-century historical eclecticism, captured in the area's Victorian homes, to twentieth-century modernism, represented in houses designed by or influenced by Prairie School architects. The district also includes civic, commercial and religious structures possessing high artistic value. The largely successful attempts in the early twentieth century to plan, order and regulate the merging of the urban apartment building form and the suburban single-family neighborhood, within the District, represented a significant precedent in American community planning. Both the architectural and planning precedents went beyond the local community to share in and influence national developments. The District's significance most readily meets National Register Criteria A; in terms of the broad pattern of suburban development it relates to Criteria C; on a local level and to some extent, on the State and National level, the architects who designed buildings in the District meet Criteria B – "lives of persons significant in our past."

Suburban Development

In 1898, the anonymous author of Halley's Pictorial of Oak Park declared "*Oak Park history is not strongly marked nor notably eventful.*" The author then proceeded: "*Cutting down forest trees and planting ornamental ones, laying out, grading and parking streets, building sidewalks, constructing ditches, drains and sewers, has been one constant practice of our people. Platting subdivisions and putting them in the market has been another. Providing cheap and frequent means of transportation to and from the City of Chicago is one particular thing we never lost sight of. Our people have contributed most freely and effectually to the providing of schools, churches, literary institutions and means of recreation... We have reclaimed the wilderness (and) have set up the standard of civilization.*"¹ Perhaps not particularly heroic, these town-building activities, the raising of houses and the development of the community, with its striking forms and patterns, are precisely what makes Oak Park "*notable*" and "*eventful*."

¹ Halley's Pictorial Oak Park, Oak Park: William Halley, 1898, p. 4.

The earliest suburban development of Oak Park originated in the 1850s, when Joseph Kettlestrings, who had purchased a large tract of land in 1835, subdivided his land into house lots. In 1849, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad carried passengers to a station in Harlem, now River Forest. Still somewhat remote from this station and Chicago, the Oak Park settlement proceeded slowly. It was not until 1866 that James W. Scoville and M. C. Niles subdivided the first major section of the District land south of the railroad track. In 1871, Scoville and William B. Ogden, Mahlan D. Ogden, Joel D. Harvey, and Josiah Lombard subdivided a large tract of land and undertook street, sidewalk, tree planting and railroad depot improvements in the eastern part of the District known as Ridgeland. Ridgeland was viewed as a link between the neighborhood of Oak Park and the growing suburb of Austin laid out by Henry Austin in 1866, just east of Ridgeland. Until 1899, when Austin was annexed to Chicago, Austin, Ridgeland, Oak Park and other western villages were politically united and incorporated as part of Cicero Township.² In 1901, Ridgeland and Oak Park merged, incorporated, and established local government as the Village of Oak Park.

In 1872, when Oak Park received its own railroad depot on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, its rapid emergence as a residential suburb of Chicago began. In 1877, the railroad was running thirty-nine trains daily between Oak Park and Chicago; in the subsequent year, more railroads and street car lines, with increased service, came to link Oak Park and Chicago. As Chicago grew from a regional center to a national metropolis Oak Park expanded – from 500 residents in 1872 to 1,812 in 1890, to 9,353 in 1900, to 20,911 in 1910, to 39,585 in 1920. Oak Park thus emerged as a leading Chicago suburb.

The Architects

Some of the District’s oldest remaining houses dating from the 1870s and 1880s are Gothic cottages and Italianate houses whose builders and architects are unknown; these include, for example, Gothic cottages located at 139 and 143 North Harvey Avenue and 143, 144, 418 and 419 N. Cuyler Avenue and Italianate style houses at 121 South Maple and 211 Clinton Avenue.



143 N. Harvey



418 N. Cuyler



121 S. Maple



211 Clinton

As Oak Park grew, buildings by Normand S. Patton and Frank Lloyd Wright, architects of national reputation, were built in the District. Well-known and established Chicago-area architects, many of whom contributed to the evolution of Prairie School forms and stylistic vocabulary also designed buildings within the District. Architects represented have included Wesley J. Arnold, William Drummond, Frank Ellis, Henry G. Fiddelke, Charles S. Frost and Alfred H. Granger, William Harley, Cicero Hines, George W. Maher, Frederick Perkins, Eben E. Roberts, Henry J. Schlacks, Frederick R. Schock, Robert C. Spencer, Jr., Thomas E. Tallmadge

² Everett Chamberlin, Chicago and Its Suburbs, Chicago: T. A. Hingerford & Co., 1874, pp. 424-427.

and Vernon S. Watson; John S. Van Bergen, William J. Van Keuren, Charles E. White, Jr., James H. Willet and Alfred Pashley and W. G. Williamson.

The character and architectural significance of the District is primarily residential and most of these architects are represented by residential design. However, in terms of community planning, the diversity of the District's buildings, outlined in Section 7, should be kept in mind. In many ways, the design work of Eben E. Roberts, probably the most widely represented architect in the District, best underscores the District's diversity. In the District, Roberts designed five single-family homes for Isaac N. Conrad (1902, 321 Clinton) and Frank W. Hall (1904-5, 412 Clinton). He designed single-family and two-flat houses for middle-class families built by small investors as well as leading speculative builders such as F. A. Hill and A. D. Orvis; he designed, for example, the Orvis home at 224 South Ridgeland (1907) and the two-flat apartments at 211, 213 and 214 South Elmwood (1905, 1905 and 1909 respectively).



321 Clinton



224 S. Ridgeland



213 S. Elmwood

The "Quadrangle" apartments (1905, 108-110 South East) and the "Wisconsin" apartments (1906, 309-315 Wisconsin), both designed by Roberts, are two of the District's nicer apartment buildings. Roberts also designed major civic, religious and commercial buildings in the District; these include the Municipal Building (1903-04, s.e. corner Euclid and Lake Street), the Scoville Business Block (1905, s.w. corner Lake Street and Oak Park Avenue), the West Suburban Hospital (1911-12), the Playhouse Theater (1913, 1111 South Boulevard) and the Euclid Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church (1921-22, s.w. corner South Euclid Avenue and Washington Boulevard). These and other non-residential buildings harmoniously supported and complemented the District's pervasive residential character.



"The Quadrangle"



"The Wisconsin"



Playhouse Theater



Euclid Avenue M.E.

Victorian Residences and Individuality

The District's major Victorian residences, designed largely in Stick and Queen Anne styles, aimed at visual delight and complexity. The irregular shapes of gables, dormers, overhanging eaves, bay windows and porches, asymmetrically disposed, introduced picturesque variety into a fairly uniform natural landscape. Perhaps united in their exuberance and dominant wood-frame

materials, the designs strive for individual expression, craftsmanship, and distinction. Stylistic accuracy and consistency within the prevailing eclecticism is of little importance. Broad porches, bay windows, rough natural materials, the interpenetration of interior and exterior space evidence contemporary concerns for sunlight and health and the view of the suburban home as a natural retreat from the city. The dominant roof, the picturesque chimneys, the inter-locking masses all embodied commonly understood images of home, health, and family – the enshrinement of the late-nineteenth century domestic ideal. The surface complexity also emphasized the compartmentalized interiors of cozy, intimate, domestic space – inglenooks, bay-window seats, sunrooms and porches. These elements represented important symbols of family life for the middle-class families of Chicago businessmen and professionals moving into Oak Park.

W. J. Van Keuren built dozens of Stick and Queen Anne style houses in the District. He designed houses for individual clients; he also designed speculative housing on his own account and for builders like F. A. Hill and S. A. Rothermel. Van Keuren’s houses lack uniformly high quality; many of the designs because of less money and/or less imagination reveal a process by which elements of a high quality design are watered-down, filtered, or eliminated in more modest commissions. This development leads to a cohesive streetscape in which shared vocabulary relates through association, modest houses to grander ones. Van Keuren’s work and the work of various subdivision buildings – F. A. Hill, R. G. Hancock, J. Kempston and Son share this characteristic of filtered grandeur. In houses for A. A. Adair (1893, 102 South Grove) and H. B. Waterman (1894, 309 Clinton) Van Keuren makes interesting use of a rectangular corner tower, turned at 45 degrees from the orientation of the main rectangular mass of the house. Van Keuren’s houses for H. B. Noyes (1891, 329 Wisconsin), J. E. Davis (1894, 315 Wesley), and W. H. Cribben (1895, 330 South Euclid) are three of his more interesting designs in the District.



102 S. Grove



309 Clinton



329 Wisconsin



330 S. Euclid

Architect Wesley A. Arnold’s house built for his family (1888, 130 South Kenilworth) takes the contemporary enthusiasm for variegated surfaces and textures and extends it into an unusual participation of building materials – sandstone, brick and slate. Also of some interest is Cicero Hines’ H. H. Morgan house (1887, 229 Wesley). Other significant essays in textured Victorian surfaces, of unknown date and architect, include houses at 329 South Maple, 121 Wesley, 113 South Elmwood, and 407 North Harvey.



130 S. Kenilworth



229 Wesley



121 Wesley



113 S. Elmwood

The District includes several fine examples of Normand S. Patton's and Henry G. Fiddelke's Queen Anne houses. Steep gables, broad overhanging eaves, protruding corner bays mark Patton & Fisher's R. S. Thain House (1892, 210 Home Avenue); the firm also designed the Townsend House (1891, 315 South East). The masses and textures of the R. S. Thain House also appear in the frame house by an unknown architect for C. R. Blanchard (1894, 235 South Grove) and in a similar house at 234 South Grove. L. A. Weage, a real estate dealer, built houses adjacent to the Blanchard House which are also of some interest (1889, 237 South Grove and 1894, 231 South Grove). The range of Henry G. Fiddelke's Queen Anne expression is captured in two houses for John I. James (1887, 209 South Grove and 1897, 138 Clinton). The former, with half-timber and picturesque juxtaposition of forms and masses contrasts sharply with the quieter, more regular and integrated form of the latter.



210 Home



235 S. Grove

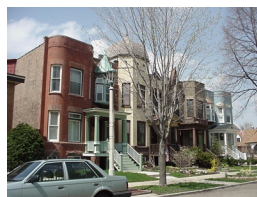


209 S. Grove



138 Clinton

Henry G. Fiddelke's design of the Jennie A. June Rowhouses (1895, 313-319 South Maple), an attached row of four brick and stone private residences, represents both an uncharacteristic form for the District and a useful summary of a leading stylistic feature of the area's Victorian homes. June's attached row of houses represents something of a reminder and fragment of the urban landscape quite out of keeping with the Oak Park ideal of individual detached homes on individual house-lots. The attached house was generally the course not taken in a suburban Village committed to the exclusion of reminders of city life, including the sale of alcohol. Fiddelke's design carefully distinguished the treatment of each house from the one adjacent to it. A pitched gable of one unit contrasted sharply with the bulging tower of the next, brick contrasted with stone, light colored material contrasted with dark. Picturesque individuality of forms and families reigned supreme.



313-319 S. Maple

Other rowhouse developments for S. A. Rothenmel designed by Van Keuren (1891, 100-110 Home) and for E. F. Burton designed by Willet & Pashley (1892, 200-208 Home), both incorporating Romanesque ornament, revealed the same striving for individual distinction. As Oak Park continued to grow in the early twentieth century architects and builders developed quieter, simpler, more symmetrical, more formal houses in the places of the earlier picturesque forms; a concern with a community of forms and families arose in the place of the earlier assertions of the individual family unit.



100-110 Home

Simplicity and Repose in the Modern Home

George W. Maher's John Farson House (1897-99, 217 Home), constructed in the nineteenth century, anticipated and suggested the reorientation of the District's domestic architectural style, which came in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Farson House is the District's largest, most costly, residence. It occupies substantial grounds made possible by Farson's purchase and removal of eight adjacent houses. The flat walls of Roman brick, the crisp geometry of the windows, bordered in stone, the simple rectangular openings of the porch, the low roof, the symmetry, formality, and classical atmosphere of repose in the main façade was antithetical to the neighborhood's Queen Anne exuberance. The District's subsequent detached residences, both grand and modest, increasingly embodied the simple elements of quiet repose found in Maher's design. Projecting bays, dormers, corner turret towers, porches, were compressed, restrained or eliminated leaving a stripped down, rectangular, box-shaped "minimal," house.



217 Home, "John Farson House"

Myriad aesthetic, social, and cultural developments impinged upon the shift in residential architecture, which the Historic District so significantly and dramatically illustrates. The classical simplicity of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and its suggestion of unity and harmony in a chaotic urban world proved attractive to both the public and established architects. The economic depression of the 1890s engendered criticism of the excesses of sham historical ornament and fostered a desire to modernize and simplify home decoration. Tenement house crusades and housing reform generally led architects to seek models of simple, inexpensive, homes. A nascent public health movement and germ theories of disease raised fears that the cozy nooks and bays and uneven surfaces and masses of Victorian houses might actually give harbor to dirt, dust, and dangerous germs. The Arts and Crafts movement fostered an aesthetic of sparseness. New household technology and attempts to reform women’s work led to a new emphasis on comfort, convenience, and simplicity – again favoring less complicated, smaller, quieter houses and farms. As home technology modernized, a preference for precise machine aesthetics proved more popular than the handicrafts of the housewife. The modern movement also eclipsed the supposed handicraft work of the Victorian builders, porch spindles, fishscale shingles, and individually crafted homes. Many of these influences coalesced most dramatically in the new works of the emerging Prairie School architects, whose works are evident throughout the District.

Houses designed by Eben E. Roberts nicely capture the new mood of simplicity, symmetry, and formality after 1900. Roberts’ design is best evidenced in houses for Isaac N. Conrad (1902, 321 Clinton), Frank W. Hall (1904-5, 412 Clinton) and C. M. Lynch (1907, 265 Home). They all include symmetrical facades, broad porches, rows of connected casement windows on the second floor and sharp, geometrical lines.



321 Clinton



412 Clinton



265 Home

The Hall House includes stucco around the second floor, above a wood-frame first floor. Although Wright introduced the stucco house to Oak Park, Roberts’ larger practice and growing commitment to stucco helped to popularize the material. Stucco’s smooth surfaces nicely reflected the clean, simple, uncluttered aesthetic of the emerging domestic ideal and architecture. The stucco was laid over both wood lathe and fireproof tile. In July 1911, the Cement Era recognized Roberts’ “*particular study of*” stucco cement and his “*determination of working out an architectural design especially adopted to it.*” In the same month, the journal Rock Products declared “*Mr. Roberts...was the first architect in Chicago to give cement its proper recognition in residence architecture. The contractors and builders accord him this distinction and he has done much and is doing much for the industry.*” The Historic District has many stucco houses designed by Roberts. The Arthur J. Lloyd House (c. 1910, 324 South Euclid), with its dramatic

curved gable and dormer above a more formal base is one of Roberts' most notable stucco houses.



324 S. Euclid

In 1907, when A. D. Orvis built all twelve houses on the east side of South Ridgeland Avenue, including several stucco residences, he had Roberts design the house at 224 South Ridgeland; Roberts probably designed the other houses on the block. Each of the houses have a somewhat distinct character but blend together well suggesting an harmonious community of homes when contrasted to a block of insistent individual Queen Anne houses. The introduction of modern stucco residential architecture and its striking continuity from one house to the next gave the District's streetscapes a new unity. In 1914, the builder W. E. Palmer constructed five adjacent detached stucco houses at 202-214 Pleasant Street. Varying only the attic dormer permitted the houses to blend together without the striking distinctions of the Victorian block. After 1900, the atmosphere of suburban sanctuary and retreat from the city, apparent in the individual Victorian home, expanded into the street. In 1916, discussing R. G. Hancock's building of entire blocks of uniform California bungalows, both inside and outside of the Historic District (1914, east side of 300 block on North Taylor) the Oak Leaves reported, "The general style of the building lends an air of refinement and exclusiveness not possible where the types of building vary greatly and no defined building restrictions are followed."³



224 S. Ridgeland



200-214 Pleasant

Frederick A. Hill, a contractor and builder, put up hundreds of houses in Austin, and along Humphrey Avenue and other streets in the eastern section of the Historic District, using plans by Schock, Van Keuren and other architects. Hill also turned his attention to a unified streetscape. He planted hundreds of trees along the parkways where he developed property and in 1914 he

³ Oak Leaves, 18 March 1916.

attempted to develop large entranceways, with monumental urns filled with plants, at the intersections of Washington Boulevard, Harlem Avenue and Austin Boulevard. He also proposed smaller flower-filled urns at each intersection along Washington Boulevard. Although there is no evidence of these plans today, the attention to images of definition, unity and community are evident in the rows of frame and stucco residences on North Taylor, South Taylor, South Lombard, and South Harvey, built between 1900 and 1920. Here builders popularized the lessons and forms of Maher, Roberts and other Prairie School architects.

The District also includes several more radical ventures into stucco design with greater emphasis on abstractly geometrical forms and sparse surfaces than were embodied in Roberts' more widespread and popular work. Among these houses are Charles E. White's design for C. W. Austin (1905, 420 Clinton), and John S. Van Bergen's designs for G. R. Hemingway (1913, 106 S. Grove), W. H. Griffith (1914, 418 S. Harvey), and Q. H. Cook (1914, 204 S. Cuyler). Other stucco residences of some merit, designed by unknown architects, include those for William Taylor (c. 1907, 661 Washington), John Hula (1908, 417 S. Grove), E. J. Merit (1911, 415 Washington), and the house located at 419 Randolph.



106 S. Grove



418 S. Harvey



661 Washington



419 Randolph

“The Impending Calamity:” Apartment and the Suburb

With growing alarm after 1900, Oak Park residents viewed the modern apartment building as a threat to their unified streetscape, to their ideal of a “a community of homes,” to the continuity of community history, and to their property values. Few, if any, building issues, stylistic or otherwise, stirred up the amount of debate and controversy as did the question of the proper place of apartment buildings within the Village of Oak Park. Irony pervaded the debate because the trends toward the reform of housework, the reform of housing, the more efficient design of domestic space, the incorporation of modern labor-saving technology in the home, the aesthetics of sparseness, and related issues which contributed to the style, plan and form of the modern detached residence also fostered the turn toward apartment living. The modern apartment offered comfort and convenience without the responsibility and cost of homeownership. Oak Park's close proximity to Chicago made it a desirable place for the denser concentration of population afforded by the apartment buildings. The Historic District's significance in the area of community planning centers upon its fairly successful resolution of the social and design issues raised by the apartment building in the suburb.

In the April, 1905 Oak Leaves, the local newspaper presented an editorial entitled “The Impending Calamity” which aptly and pointedly expressed the widespread resistance to the apartment building; it declared, “*Oak Park is threatened with an invasion – a foreign invasion – of flats. The advance guard of the enemy is already upon us and the great host of its army is encamped at our very borders. Its encroachments, insidious and insinuating though they be, are*

none the less effective and, in a few years, will prove none the less fatal to those ideals that have hitherto distinguished our village as a residence suburb and a “community of homes.” Oak Park has stood thus far for that distinctive type of individual and community life that has its dependence upon broad expanse of open space, upon grass and trees and sunlight and fresh air. When it ceases to stand for that, it ceases to be Oak Park.”⁴ A short time later, the same editorial page again criticized the flat building. Usurping the open-spaces devoted to lawns and trees around detached residence, the Oak Leaves suggest, “the flat destroys all this and gives in its place a lot of dry-good-box architecture lined up on the street without beauty and forming a bar to the circulation of fresh air and the accessibility of sunshine, nature’s two great health givens.”⁵ While the social and aesthetic sides of the apartment building question were perhaps uppermost in residents’ minds, the legal defense of private property rights made the public health question particularly important.

The furor over apartment buildings led to calls for social restraint on the part of land owners and for ordinances and regulation on the part of the Village Board. In fact, the Board’s earliest building ordinance adopted in 1902 started a long process of controlling apartment building construction. The 1902 ordinance required that apartment buildings of three or more families be construction of brick, stone, iron or other incombustible material. The ordinance required fire escapes and limited the area the buildings could cover to 85% of corner lots and to 75% of other lots; it also limited apartment building heights to one-half the width of the broadest adjacent street (thus generally limiting heights from 33 feet to 40 feet). Minimum dimensions for light courts, rooms, windows, and minimum numbers of sinks and toilets were also established. The Village Board, in making what the Oak Leaves considered “stringent restrictions against the cheap construction of apartment buildings,” took what many considered a step toward “securing the beauty of the Village for the future.”⁶ In 1904, hoping to attract the “better class of home builders,” Board President Allen S. Ray urged the Board to “go to the extreme limit of its powers in regulating (apartment) ...and in providing that they shall be unobjectionable to the inhabitants of the Village.”⁷

The small, two-flat apartment building proved to be one of the best means making apartments “unobjectionable” to Oak Park residents. E. E. Roberts received special credit from contemporary writers for developing a two-flat building which blended harmoniously with single-family residences. In 1911, Village Board President August Einfeldt pointed with favor to the 15 stucco two-flats constructed in Oak Park in 1911, like Roberts’ designs for the two-flats at 211, 213 and 241 S. Elmwood. He lauded the apartments as “an improvement rather than a discredit to our Village, and much more preferable than plain brick flats.”⁸

⁴ Oak Leaves, 22 April 1905.

⁵ Oak Leaves, 27 May 1905.

⁶ Oak Leaves, 16 July 1904.

⁷ Annual Report of the Village of Oak Park, Cook County, Illinois for the Fiscal Year January 1st, 1904 to December 31st 1902, Oak Park: Ainsworth & Wilson, 1903, p. 8.

⁸ Ibid., 1911 Annual Report, p. 3-4; see also 1912 Annual Report, p. 4.



211 S. Elmwood



213 S. Elmwood



241 S. Elmwood

In 1910, pointing to the stringency of the building ordinance the Oak Leaves reported that ordinance had encouraged the construction of two-flats; it noted with some satisfaction that they had “*the exterior appearance of an ordinary dwelling, and (were) proving a very desirable thing as a place of residence, as an ornament to the community, and as an investment.*”⁹ These stucco two-flats succeeded in disguising their multi-family character by following the same basic site plan and building outline as the single-family house and obscuring or tucking away the second entry.

The building ordinance did not completely ban larger apartment buildings; however, the general air of resistance to flats did affect their design. In 1905, discussing the “*Impending Calamity*” the Oak Leaves expressed the hope that the apartment building controversy and regulation would either put an end to their development or lead to “*such a modification of the flat idea as to bring it into harmony with...Oak park ideals;*” according to the newspaper E. E. Roberts’ design for Luther Conant’s “*Quadrangle*” apartments (1905, 108-110 South East) represented one such building “*in harmony*” with those ideals.¹⁰ Roberts, who advertised himself as an architect of “*Homelike Homes*” and “*homey dwellings*” led the way in extending “*homey*” images to the Oak Park apartment building. In the “*Quadrangle*” development, Roberts placed three separate buildings with six apartments each, around a well-kept lawn and circular driveway. The building observed the building line established by private residences on the block. Roberts excluded light courts and airshafts entirely – every room had an outside window. The half-timbered gable, the open porches for each apartment, the broad lawn, shared more common features with suburban private residences than with the flat-roofed “*dry goods boxes*” of the typical urban flat buildings. The Oak Leaves applauded the design as a “*high water mark of apartment house construction.*”¹¹



108-118 S. East Avenue – “Quadrangle” Apartments

⁹ Oak Leaves, 5 February 1910.

¹⁰ Oak Leaves, 22 April 1905.

¹¹ Oak Leaves, 27 August 1905.

Although the apartment buildings built between 1905 and 1920 in the District rarely achieved the site and architectural character of the “Quadrangle,” this building included what turned out to be many recurring elements and themes. Most importantly, obvious efforts were made to harmonize the features and concerns of contemporary domestic architecture with apartment building design. The interchange was spurred by the controversy and regulations concerning the apartment in Oak Park. To varying degrees, the apartment designs left an unaccustomed amount of lawn around the building, exceeding the 15% to 25% required by ordinance. In 1916, the building ordinance was amended to require that apartment buildings observe the building of adjacent buildings on the block; however, some apartments had already observed this requirement – for example, H. H. Richards’ design for the Biggs Brothers Apartment (1910-15, 201-207 S. Lombard) and the “Glen Ellyn” (1912, 127-33 S. Harvey). The “Oakdale Apartments” (1906-07, 136 S. Harvey) did not observe the lot-line and did not evidence particularly imaginative design; yet, its narrow width in relation to the lot eliminated the need for courts and air shafts and left an ample 100-foot wide backyard. A 1907 advertisement for the “Oakdale” declared that it was designed on the premise that *“the dweller in an apartment is entitled to the same conveniences and to as good light as the man who lives in a house.”*¹²



Biggs Brothers Apartment



The Glen Ellyn



The Oakdale

Aside from considerations of siting, the apartment buildings continued to incorporate “homey” architectural features. The concern of the homeowner for sunlight and air worked itself out in elaborate schemes for porches and sunrooms. The front bays of porches or sun rooms also tended to break up the building façade into a less imposing series of related units. The pitched terra cotta roof, half timber, casement window, art glass, geometric ornament, and a mixture of materials – brick, stucco, and stone – linked the buildings to single-family house designs. E. E. Roberts’ “Wisconsin” apartments (1906, 309-315 Wisconsin) and the apartments of unknown architect at 801-809 Washington and 255-257 South Maple bear obvious features of Prairie School design.



The Wisconsin



801-809 Washington



255-257 South Maple

¹² Oak Leaves, 27 April 1907.

The “LuViola” (1914-15, 815-821 Washington) built by Lewis H. Webb, is a design of extraordinary quality. The green tile entry pavilions are supported on brackets, which echo Greene and Greene’s California designs. The contrast of stone and brick establish a fine, abstractly geometrical pattern in the walls, while the art glass windows suggest the interior richness of beam ceiling mahogany buffets and tile bathrooms. Frederick R. Schock’s design for E. A. Cummings apartments (1912, 135-141 N. Ridgeland) dramatically juxtaposed red brick and the geometrical ornament characteristics of the Prairie School, executed of white terra cotta. In keeping with modern effort at harmonious community design, Schock’s apartments echoed the elements of the adjacent store and apartment building, which he also designed for E. A. Cummings (1911, 400-404 Lake).



The LuViola



135-141 N. Ridgeland



400-404 Lake

Other notable apartment designs include two buildings by architect Willam B. Pruyn, Jr., the “Oak Ridge” (1916, 949 Lake) and the “Lorain” (1915, 38-44 Washington). The Johnson Brothers firm of builders constructed some of the fine apartment buildings in the District, including two large courtyard buildings – “Midway Park” apartments (1915, 440 North Austin) and “Ridgecourt” (1915, 302-312 Washington). “Homey” apartment buildings like “Seven Elms” with half-timber, stucco, tile roof, and landscaped courtyards (1915, 815-821 Lake) could harmoniously settle into the “architectural center of Oak Park,” around the Scoville Institute, an area which it had earlier been thought would be spoiled if apartments were constructed.¹³



The Oak Ridge



The Lorain



Midway Park Apts.



Ridgecourt

Between about 1900 and World War I, public criticism, Village ordinances and architects’ innovations fostered many apartment buildings of some merit which appeared sensitive to “Oak Park ideals.” Village ordinances only addressed the character of individual buildings and not their location or pattern within the Village. Some Oak Park builders with large enough land and building operations actively addressed these issues. Thomas H. Hulbert, who in 1904 began to

¹³ Oak Leaves, 16 May 1908.

build houses on Clinton and South Kenilworth Avenues, south of Madison, proudly advertised “*The Hulbert Houses, Oak Park, Residences Only – No Flats Allowed.*” Hulbert backed his promise with “ironclad” deed restrictions barring all single-family residences in his subdivision ***** until 1945.¹⁴ Smaller developers could not offer the same guarantee in other parts of the Village – particularly in older areas where relocating homeowners had little interest in making their house sale difficult with restrictions covering only single lots. For all of the apartment building’s virtues and fine designs, homeowners still worried about the apartment buildings’ potential to tip the balance and character in their own neighborhood.

Zoning, Order and Community Design

After World War I, zoning appeared to concerned Oak Park homeowners as a new and powerful means to preserve neighborhood character in the “community of homes.” The basis and emphasis of the apartment building controversy shifted from single building designs to community planning and patterns. A 1921 Oak Leaves editorial reflected the transition; praising the modern apartment building as an important modern invention and “achievement” the newspaper reported, “*The objection is not to the apartment house itself but to its location.*”¹⁵ In 1919, the Oak Leaves proposed that Oak Park residents turn their ability, evidenced during the War, for working “*harmoniously and efficiently for the government*” into a crusade for zoning – “*No plan for the future welfare of any community can more directly contribute to the happiness of its citizens than a comprehensive, fair and impartial zoning plan.*”¹⁶ The 1919 call for zoning coincided with a major Oak Park Housing-Living Exposition which aimed to revive the housing industry and to promote an “Own Your Own Home” campaign. New homeowners and buyers needed some guarantee that their new homes would not be overwhelmed by apartments on adjacent lots.

In July 1919, the Village Board appointed a Zoning Commission headed by architect Charles E. White, Jr. The Zoning Ordinance was slowed somewhat by legal hurdles in the State Legislature. When Oak Park was enabled to enact Zoning in 1921, only 27 other American communities had zoning laws. The ordinance embodied and extended earlier regulations concerning building height, percentage of lot coverage, and dimensions of light courts. The ordinance added restrictions on the numbers of families per acre, and most importantly, divided the entire Village into separate districts for: (1) single-family residence, (2) multi-family residence, (3) commercial buildings, and (4) industrial buildings. Zoning, thus, finally provided an orderly and predictable pattern or framework, upon which the community, apartment buildings included, would develop in the future.

In terms of the Historic District, which had been almost completely filled with buildings by 1920, the zoning ordinance protected and preserved broad areas of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century single-family residences from being demolished or intruded upon by a more intensive second generation of apartment buildings. The zoned districts and a continuing demand for apartment accommodations in the 1920s population boom also led to the intensively developed apartment strips which bound and contain the District along Maple and Wisconsin Avenues, Washington Boulevard, and Austin Boulevard. During the 1920s apartment buildings

¹⁴ Oak Leaves, 2 December 1905, 26 October 1907; Economist, 32 (15 October 1904): 507.

¹⁵ Oak Leaves, 25 June 1921.

¹⁶ Oak Leaves, 8 March 1919.

developed along these streets; assured of their importance and position they eschewed some of the “homey” aspects of earlier buildings. Charles E. White, Jr., Chairman of the Zoning Commission, designed several buildings which stand in curious relation to his earlier modern design: 24-32 Washington (1921) and 124-130 Washington (1923). In structures like those designed by Roy France (1925, 237-251 Washington) and Henry J. Appelbach (1929, 415-427 South Taylor), which each housed 49 families, the apartment building took on a more ponderous form, clothed in historical ornament and references.



In 1913, the Chicago City Club sponsored an architectural competition for the residential design of a large tract of urban land. The competitors were asked to grapple with the problem of merging single-family and multi-family residences with civic, religious, and commercial buildings. The design problem appeared central to residential development in both city and suburb. The Oak Park zoning ordinance and its subsequent guidance of the community emerged in 1921 as one particularly successful and practical solution to the problem of suburban development raised in the City Club competition. Its success can be gauged in part by the balanced contrast between the bustling character of the apartment-lined periphery of this Historic District and the quiet suburban atmosphere of the interior streets lined with detached residences on broad lawns and parkways. The unusual community planning and preservation represented in the District complement the architecture of individual structures in establishing the area’s historical significance.

Related Districts

Both locally and nationally, there are few parallels to this District’s juxtaposition of Victorian and Prairie School styles of architecture. The architecture and community planning of the District is most relevant to regional and state levels of significance. The established historic district which most closely approximates this District is Chicago’s Kenwood-Hyde Park Historic District. Both districts possess a similar diversity of residential, civic, religious and commercial structures. The Historic District lacks the many substantial mansions of Kenwood; however, this fact is compensated for by the District’s close proximity to the Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School of Architecture Historic District which contains many larger homes. The Hyde Park section also lacks the generous lawns and parkways of Oak Park and, in many areas, because of less-regulated twentieth-century development, it has assumed a more urban character. In terms of the architectural significance of individual single-family homes, the Wright/Prairie School District complements, and exceeds, the structures of the present district; however, both in terms of the significance of its civic, religious and commercial architecture and the significance of its community planning, the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District possesses notable, significant structures and qualities lacking in the earlier Wright District.