



329 Wisconsin Ave.

The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 and was locally designated by the Village of Oak Park in 1994. The District has irregular boundaries, but is generally bounded by Austin Boulevard on the east, Harlem Avenue on the west, Madison Street on the south, and South Boulevard, Superior and Lake Streets on the north. Of the approximately 1,700 buildings within the District, nearly 1,500 contribute to its historic and architectural character. The overall integrity and historic character of the District has been well preserved.

Spanning the decades from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, the District's residential architecture embodies a myriad of building styles and types, from 19th century eclecticism to 20th century modernism. The major evolution of domestic architecture embodied in the District was accompanied by a growing use of stucco in place of wood in house exteriors. Wide parkway lawns between the street and the sidewalks enhance the spacious character of single-family house lots. The single-family residence areas are bounded by streets lined with brick apartment buildings built mainly between 1905 and 1929. Also included in the district are many of Oak Park's finest civic, religious and commercial buildings. The largely successful attempts during the early 20th century to plan, order and regu-

late the merging of the urban apartment building form and the suburban single-family neighborhood in the District, represented a significant precedent in American community planning. Such architectural and planning precedents went beyond the local community of Oak Park and was part of a national trend.

Residential Architecture

The numerous single-family residences built in the District prior to 1900 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 architecture are located throughout the District, with the highest concentration located west of East Avenue. A few brick Victorian row-houses and apartments, some in the Romanesque style, are also found in the District.

Around 1900, as the population of the District rapidly expanded, many single-family homes were constructed in new forms using different, innovative materials. Modern styles, such as the American Foursquare and Bungalow, and popular revival styles such as Tudor, Classical and Colonial, appeared throughout the District. Although the District contains Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity



200-208 Clinton Ave.



Unity Temple, 875 Lake St.

Temple, it otherwise lacks examples of Wright's mature Prairie School residential designs found in abundance in Oak Park in the Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District. However, in its post-1900 houses, the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District does bear the unmistakable imprint of the Prairie School's more modern architectural style. During that time, many Prairie School architects, and the builders who popularized their work, began filling the area with simple, rectangular houses known as the American Foursquare, which were more symmetrical than the late Victorian homes. While a few homes were constructed of brick or wood, the more common use of light-colored stucco to cover the exterior wall surface marked a transition in building material and texture as striking as the stylistic evolution.

After 1900, the two-flat, double-decker, detached residential apartment appeared in the District, which maintained the same over-all exterior form as the modern stucco single-family residence. Consequently, the two-flat apartment settled harmoniously and, in many cases, unnoticed into blocks of single-family residences.

The numerous apartment buildings constructed between 1905 and 1929 tempered, but did not destroy, the pervasive suburban character of the District. The mostly brick apartment buildings are between two and four stories. Many

builders and architects sought to achieve a harmonious suburban landscape by including in their apartment building designs a variety of elements such as porches, sunrooms, bay windows, half-timbering, casement windows and geometrical ornamentation. The District's apartment buildings contain surface ornamentation of Prairie, Tudor, Medieval and Classical architecture. To retain some suburban character, larger apartment buildings with several entrances arranged around landscaped courtyards were developed between 1915 and 1929.

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 locations. The District encompasses significant examples of these buildings.

The District's ecclesiastical architecture includes numerous architectural styles such as Romanesque, English Gothic, French Gothic and Prairie. These churches were constructed in a wide array of building materials, including gran-

What is an Historic District?

An historic district is an area with geographically definable boundaries, possessing a significant concentration of properties united aesthetically by plan or physical development, or by past events, that has been designated as an Oak Park Historic District pursuant to Village ordinance. In an historic district, most buildings contribute to the significance of the area without individually having the credentials of a landmark. These buildings are referred to as *Contributing Resources*. They help to maintain the historic integrity of the neighborhood. Buildings that do not contribute to the significance of the historic district are usually less than 50 years old or have been significantly altered in the recent past. These buildings are referred to as *Non-Contributing Resources*.

ite boulders, ashlar cut granite, Bedford limestone and modern reinforced concrete. The imposing Art Deco post office, designed by White & Weber (1933), is constructed of Bedford limestone and represents one of the community's greatest civic structures.

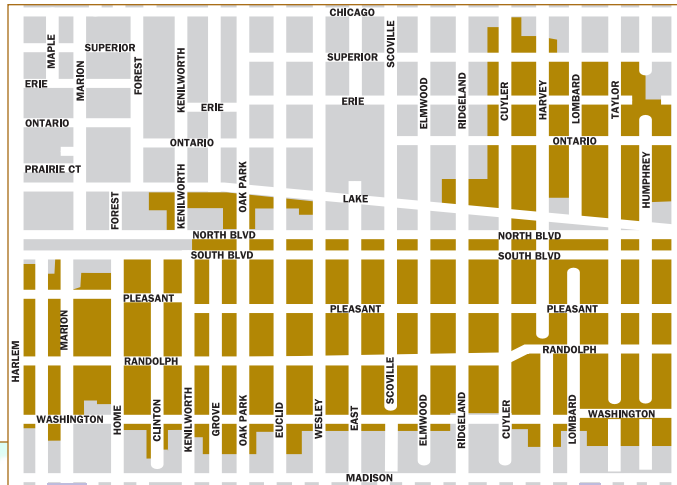
The significant commercial structures are located primarily in concentrated nodes, which were determined initially by their accessibility to railroad stations in the District. Built between 1890 and 1929, the major commercial buildings are constructed of brick, stone and terra cotta and are from two to four stories. They typically combine commercial/retail stores on the first floor with office and/or apartment space above. The outstanding exception to this pattern is Roy Hotchkiss' 10-story design for the Art Deco style Medical Arts Building (1929) on Lake Street, faced in white concrete and green terra cotta. The District's significant commercial structures, like the churches, present broad stylistic variety, including Prairie, Queen Anne and various revival styles.



Medical Arts Building,
715 Lake St.

Development of the District

In 1866, James W. Scoville and Milton C. Niles subdivided the first major section of land in the District south of the railroad track for future development. Then, in 1872, Scoville and partners 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. This community had close ties with Oak Park to the west and the community of



Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District

Austin to the east, which was laid out by Henry Austin in 1866.

Austin, Ridgeland and Oak Park were unincorporated villages within Cicero Township until Austin was annexed to Chicago in 1899, and the villages of Ridgeland and Oak Park merged, incorporated and established local government as the Village of Oak Park in 1902.

As Chicago grew to become the nation's second largest city, Oak Park's population grew dramatically — from 500 residents in 1872, to 9,353 in 1900 and to nearly 60,000 in 1930. Oak Park thus emerged as a leading Chicago suburb. The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District encompassed architectural development and community planning throughout that period.

Guidebook

The Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission published a guidebook to the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District in 1993. The guidebook — *Ridgeland Revealed* — provides a more in-depth history of the growth of the District. The volume is illustrated and includes a map showing a cross-section of buildings of interest in the District. The guidebook is sold at local book stores and available in the Oak Park Public Library.



Oak Park

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On the cover: 213 S. Euclid Ave.



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