

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Coming of age in the 20s

Part three of four on the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District
by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) November 9th, 2022

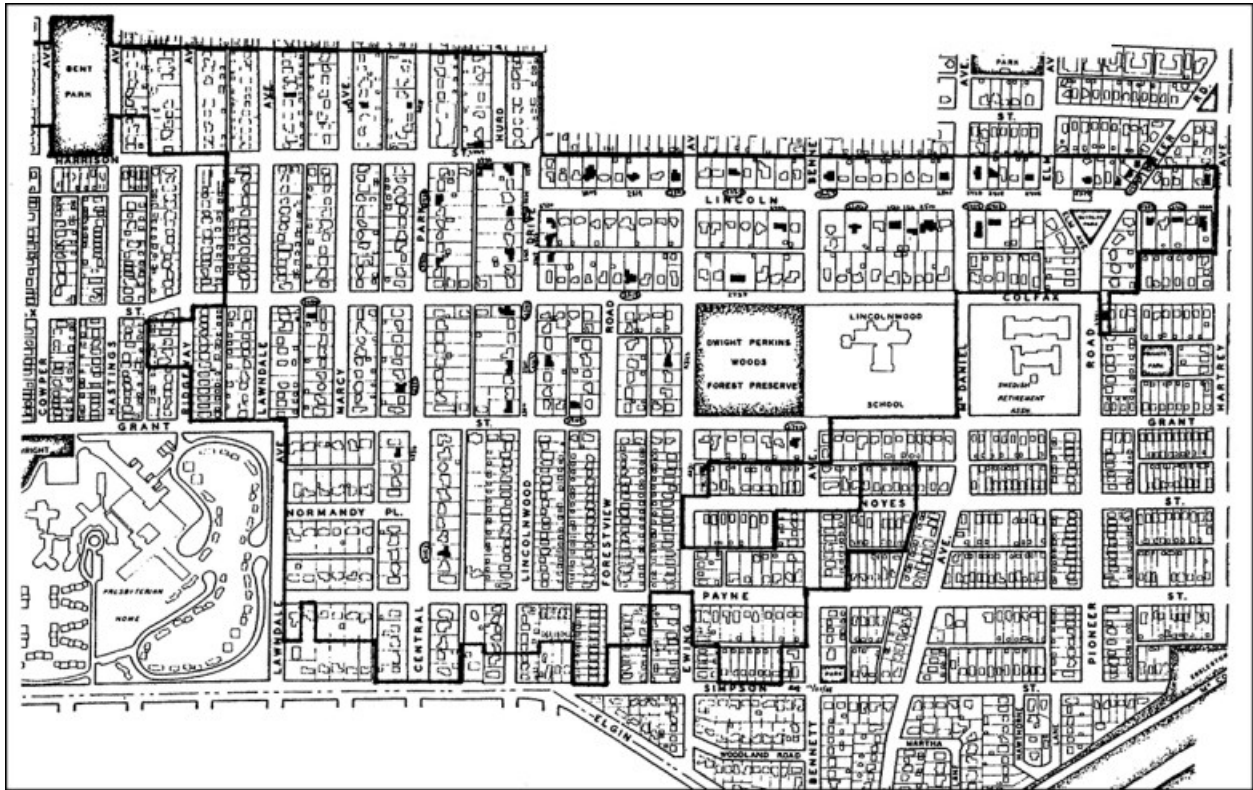
[Part one](#) of this series reprinted the introduction to the 1988 proposal by Anne Earle to consider nomination of a Northwest Evanston Historic District and provided her description of the older east portion. [Part two](#) featured Earle's discussion about the types of properties identified in the proposed district. Part three, reproduced below as originally written by Earle, focuses on development in the west portion of the proposed district.

If you're reading this for the first time, keep in mind that much has changed in northwest Evanston since the grant proposal was written 35 years ago. Also, many homes we admire today, although present at the time of the proposal, were "newer" than the early 1930s time frame and were therefore not mentioned.

Coming of Age in the Twenties: The Development of Northwest Evanston in the First Third of the Twentieth Century

By Anne O. Earle

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.



Evanston Landmarks and Illinois Historic Structures Survey Houses Within the Proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. Landmarked homes shown in black. Credit: Anne O. Earle

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.



2301-2319 Ridgeway Ave. Architect: M. Fishman. 1926. Credit: Jack Weiss

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.



2153 Central Park Ave., local landmark. Architect: Lowe & Speer. 1931. Credit: The Lakota Group

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.

Part four of this series is scheduled to post Nov. 23.

Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" column focuses on Evanston's design history and advocates for good design. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.