

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

Part four of four on the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District  
by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) November 21st, 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](#) focused on development in the west portion of the proposed district. Part four, reproduced below as originally written by Earle, summarizes the character of the proposed district and concludes by encouraging an application to list the area on the National Register of Historic Places.*

*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 1930's time frame and were therefore not mentioned.*

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

By Anne O. Earle

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 Quitsow, Robert Rae, Meyer J. Sturm, Bertha Y. Whitman, and others.



2518 Central Park Ave., local landmark. Architect: R.G. Hinkel and E.O. Blake. 1923. Credit: The Lakota Group

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; twenty-one of those are also listed on the 1972 Illinois Historic Structures Survey.



3040 Colfax St., local landmark. Architect: Willis J. Beck. 1928. Credit: The Lakota Group

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.

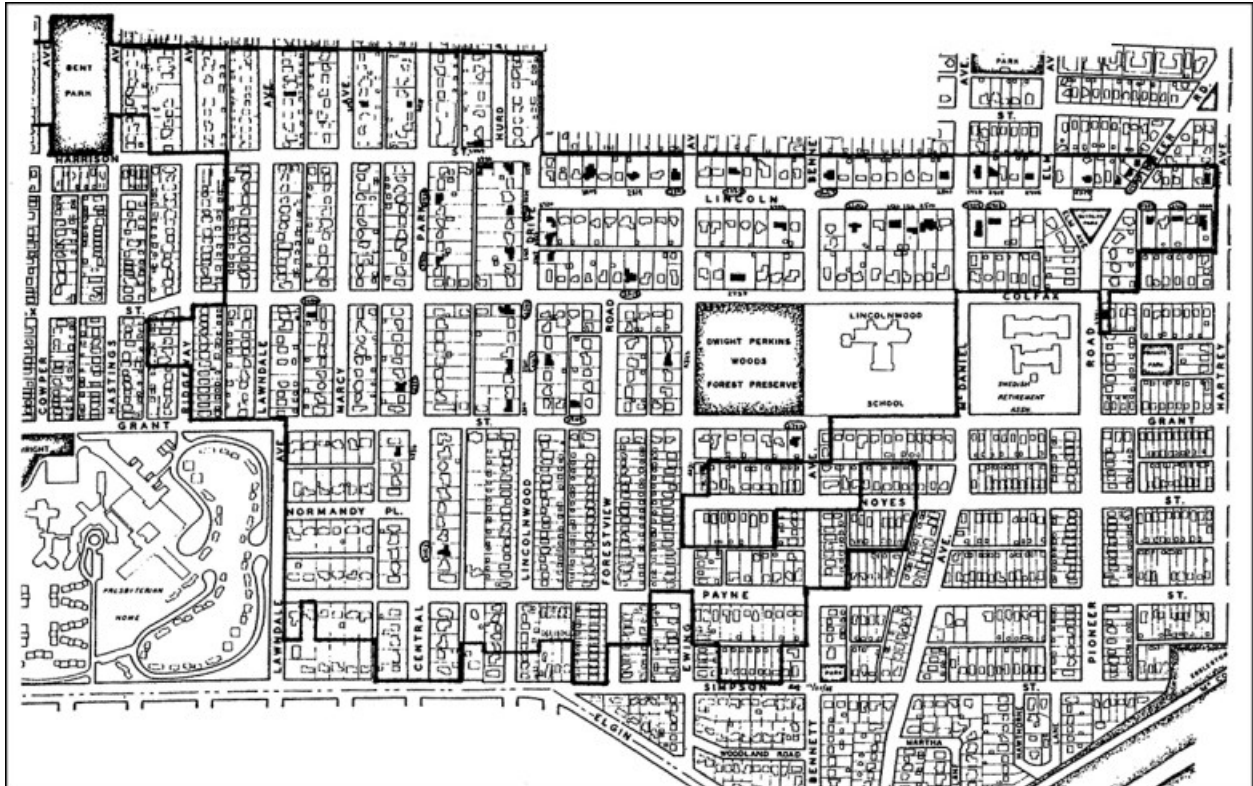
About half of the single-family houses within the proposed district have free-standing garages. Most of the others have attached garages. The role of public transportation and automobile ownership on the development of the proposed district needs to be investigated.

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.



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

*When viewing the map of the proposed Historic District, it becomes apparent that the number of landmarked homes in the west half is small, likely because most were built after “the first third of the twentieth century” – the time frame established in the proposal. Since that time many more homes have subsequently been landmarked.*

*It should be noted, as well, that two additional historic districts have been established in Evanston since Anne Earle’s proposal was written: The Northeast Evanston Historic District in 1999 and the Oakton Historic District in 2005.*

*Nearly all of the photos shown in this series are credited to The Lakota Group. In 2015 the City of Evanston commissioned the Chicago-based planning firm to lead a survey team to document all individually designated landmarks in Evanston, whether inside or out of its four historic districts. That Evanston Landmark Inventory Report, like Earle’s proposal, has not garnered much attention. A future Thoughts on Design essay will discuss that survey.*

*By reporting on the 1988 Northwest Evanston Historic District proposal, I hope Design Evanston brings critical attention and renewed interest to this most important effort to nominate*

*Evanston's fifth historic district. It is safe to say that Anne Earle will be one of the first to volunteer!*

*As I indicated at the end of part one of this series, I'll be providing a follow-up story on the benefits of historic districts next. If these essays have piqued your interest, here are two useful sources:*

*For information on local landmark districts go to: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district>*

*For information on the National Register of Historic Places go to: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-tips-to-build-your-national-register-knowledge>*

*Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" column focuses on Evanston's design history and advocates for good design. Visit [designevanston.org](http://designevanston.org) to learn more about the organization.*

Source: Evanston RoundTable 11.21.22