

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | A primer on Evanston landmark districts

Part one of two articles on the importance of Evanston's historic districts
by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) December 6th, 2022

In the preceding [four-part series](#) of “Thoughts on Design” columns published in October and November, the argument was made to consider revisiting Anne Earle’s 1988 proposal to nominate the Northwest Evanston Historic District. Should such an effort emerge, it is important for the community to fully understand the facts about historic districts.

The City of Evanston is home to five National Register Historic Districts: Evanston Lakeshore (established in 1980), Evanston Ridge (1983), Northeast Evanston (1999), Oakton (2005) and Suburban Apartment Buildings (1900), which features multifamily residences across the city. All those districts, with the exception of the Oakton Historic District, are also Local Landmark Districts.

The following four descriptions are taken from Wikipedia:

The **Evanston Lakeshore Historic District** is a residential historic district in [Evanston](#) that includes 765 contributing structures. The district encompasses a section of southeast Evanston that was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As [Chicago](#) expanded in the late nineteenth century, its residential development surged past its northern border and into Evanston, causing the suburb to grow considerably. Early laws, including the first municipal zoning law in 1921, restricted development in southeast Evanston to single-family houses. Prominent architectural styles within the district include [Italianate](#), [Queen Anne](#), [Tudor Revival](#), and [Georgian Revival](#).



Jernegan House, 1144 Michigan (1890). Architect, Enock Hill Turnock. National Register and Local Landmark in the Lakeshore Historic District. Credit: Jack Weiss

The **Evanston Ridge Historic District** is a residential historic district in [Evanston](#). The district includes 397 contributing structures situated along a glacial ridge that was the site of the first white settlement in Evanston in the 1830s. As the development of Evanston accelerated in the mid-nineteenth century, the ridge became a desirable location for new residents, and the growth of [Northwestern University](#) and new rail links to Chicago continued to spur development into the twentieth century. As a result, the houses in the district were built over the course of several decades, with most built between 1860 and 1930. The [Italianate](#), [Queen Anne](#), and [Prairie School](#) styles are all particularly common in the district.



Pirie House, 1332 Church Street (1898). Architect, Myron Hunt. National Register & Local Landmark in the Ridge Historic District. Credit: Jack Weiss

The **Northeast Evanston Historic District** is a residential historic district in northeastern [Evanston](#). The district includes 474 [contributing buildings](#) in an area bounded by Sheridan Place to the north, [Lake Michigan](#) to the east, Emerson Street to the south, and Ridge Avenue and the [CTA's Purple Line](#) to the west. The area was developed later than central and southeast Evanston; while its oldest building dates from the 1860s, most of the homes in the district were built between 1890 and 1930. The district's houses are representative of the popular architectural styles of the period; the [American Craftsman](#), [Tudor Revival](#), and [Colonial Revival](#) styles are especially prevalent.



Former Roycemore School, 640 Lincoln (1915-1927). Architect: Lawrence Beck with Tallmadge & Watson. National Register and Local Landmark in the Northeast Evanston Historic District. Credit: Thshriver/Wikipedia.org

The **Oakton Historic District** is a residential historic district in south central [Evanston](#). The district includes 203 [contributing buildings](#), most of which were developed between 1913 and 1940. Development on Evanston's lakeshore began in the mid-nineteenth century, but the land that became the district was part of a large farm owned by the Mulford family at the time; once the family had sold most of its land, the area was [platted](#) in 1890. Most of the residences in the district are single-family houses, a product of Evanston's early zoning laws. The houses reflect the popular architectural trends of the early twentieth century; the [Tudor Revival](#), [Colonial Revival](#), and [American Craftsman](#) styles are most common.



Oakton School, 436 Ridge (1913). Architect: Perkins Fellows & Hamilton. National Register and Local Landmark in the Oakton Historic District. Credit: Jack Weiss

And here is a description of the fifth historic district, taken from its landmark nomination:

The **Suburban Apartment Buildings in Evanston District** includes 48 buildings that represent the very best examples of Evanston suburban apartment buildings and illustrate the development of this apartment type in Evanston. The buildings date from 1890 rowhouses to the late 1920s when apartments built in the community tended to be predominantly courtyard buildings. The buildings encompass a few works of nationally known architects such as Myron Hunt and Holabird & Roche and many works of lesser-known architects. All the apartment buildings exhibit a high level of design quality and integrity.



Michigan & Lee Apartments, 940-950 Michigan (1927). Architect: Frank W. Cauley. National Register and Local Landmark in the Suburban Apartment Buildings District. Credit: Jack Weiss

In addition to Evanston's historic districts, the city has 858 individual local landmarks. Of these, 428 are outside the city's designated historic districts and were documented in the *2015 Evanston Landmark Inventory Report*. As reported in the previous "Thoughts on Design" series about the proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District, the 2015 inventory identifies 58 landmark homes in that area of the city. [This map](#) shows the locations of those 428 landmarks; you can click on each structure to view details.



Will House, 2949 Harrison (1937). Architect: Perkins Wheeler & Will. Local Landmark in the 1988 proposed Northwest Evanston Historic District. Credit: Jack Weiss

It was not the intent of the authors of the Design Evanston book, *Evanston: 150 Years 150 Places*, to highlight landmarks. I was surprised then, when researching this story, to discover that of the 150 places described 87 are local landmarks and 50 national landmarks – a total of 137. (The book can be purchased at Bookends & Beginnings and Chicago-Main Newsstand.)

Part two of this series, describing the differences between and benefits of National Register and Local Landmark districts, is scheduled to post later this month.

Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" articles focus on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.

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