

If you are interested in preserving Oak Lawn's heritage and would like to volunteer your time and energy, and if you have photographs, films, memorabilia, artifacts, oral history and would like to share them please contact the Village at:

708/499-7837 or email **historic@oaklawn-il.gov**.

June 2012



The Village of Oak Lawn

Historic
Preservation
Commission



Village of Oak Lawn
9446 S. Raymond Ave
Oak Lawn IL 60453-2449

Preserving the history of *Oak Lawn*

In 1996, the Village President and Board of Trustees passed an ordinance creating the Oak Lawn Historical Preservation Commission. The commission is a seven member committee appointed by the mayor and trustees. Members commit to two years terms and meet quarterly in the Village Municipal Center. Meetings are open and held on the first Thursday of February, May, August, and November and all are welcome to attend. The commission works with the Village on issues of historical significance.

Some of the goals the commission has set for itself are:

- Generate ideas to preserve and beautify historic areas of the Village.
- Work with local, state, and federal governments to acquire grants to improve historic areas in the Village.
- Designate certain homes and businesses to be of historic value.
- Create programs to educate children and adults on the history of Oak Lawn.

To learn more about Oak Lawn's past, visit the Local History section of the Oak Lawn Library. We thank them for their assistance in providing information for this brochure.

The following are some brief highlights of Our History:

By 1832, Native American Indians, mainly Potawatomi, Illini, and Miami, had been forced out of the area.

In 1842, Mr. John Simpson traded his gold watch for the price of the bank stock to purchase property at 93rd/Southwest Highway and Central Avenue – the site of the Homestead Barr.

By 1860, Black Oaks Grove, later Oak Lawn, constructed its first school (Northeast corner of 95th Street and 55th Avenue).

Following the Civil War, German immigrants were drawn to settle in the area and organized the Trinity Lutheran Church (originally located at 5000 West 95th Street).

In 1881, the Wabash Railroad was ready for service.

On February 4, 1909, the first citizens' meeting was held in Larson's Hall, 2nd floor (now the St. James Place Tavern, formerly the Oak Lawn Family Shoe Store, 5305 West 95th Street) to plan for Oak Lawn to become an incorporated area. The boundaries at the time were 97th Street North, 99th Street South, 48th Street (Cicero) East and 56th Avenue (Central) West. Incorporation was granted May 13, 1909. The population was 287.

On April 20, 1909, James Montgomery was elected the first Village President.

1905 – Cook Avenue School opened with two classrooms. The first teachers were Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Covington. In 1912, the enrollment was 76 students.

In 1910, historic black oaks were cut down along 95th Street and sidewalks were laid.

In 1920, the first fire engine was bought and telephone poles were erected.

In 1959, Oak Lawn celebrated its Golden Jubilee by building the former Village Hall on James Street (later Dumke Drive). It was demolished in 1994 and is presently the site of the Village Green Town Center.



McAninch House
 9402 S 55th Ave
 Built 1920

During the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the bungalow style home took American by storm. These solidly built and inexpensive

structures afforded many Americans the opportunity to purchase homes of their own. The Oak Lawn McAninch House, built in 1920 by George Klein, is just such a structure, and believed to be one of the few Queen Anne bungalow style homes in the Chicago metropolitan area. In October of 1940, it was purchased by James and Lillian McAninch Sr. for \$4,500.00. During the 1967 Tornado, the house received significant damage, which required the building of a new roof and the installation of twenty-eight new windows. The rest of the home was able to withstand the extreme conditions, attesting to the bungalows reputation of solid construction. In the following decades, the McAninch family continued to own and maintain the house before Lillian Jr. finally sold the property in 1985.



Designated Site
 9600 West shore Dr
 Built 1926

Built in 1926 by Rudolph Krol which is why it has many unique features and is one of a kind. He was an engineer at International Harvester and had numerous patents. He designed

the house specifically to view Oak Lawn, which is why it doesn't directly face North and South and is built at 45 degrees off angle.

Oak Lawn Historic Preservation Commission Designated Sites List

Auschwitz House	9625 East Shore Drive
Buehler Home	9545 South Meade Avenue
Chapman House	9126 South 54th Avenue
Designated Site	9527 South LaCrosse Avenue
Designated Site	9515 South Brandt Avenue
Designated Site	9600 South 52nd Avenue
Designated Site	9600 West Shore Drive
Gaddis Home	9632 South Cook Avenue
Harker Home	5317 West 95th Street
Homestead Barr	9306 South Central Avenue
Ice House	9700 South Cook Avenue
Keyhole House	5400 West 96th Street
Kolb House	9217 South 50th Avenue
McAninch House	9402 South 55th Avenue
Oak Lawn Farm House	4250 West 107th Street
Oak Lawn Lake	9600 East & West Shore Drive
O'Brien Courthouse	9530 South 53rd Avenue
O'Brien House	9402 South 53rd Court
Simpson House	9602 South 54th Avenue
Spitzer's Gas Station	5500 West 95th Street
Tank Memorial	95th Street & Sproat Avenue



Oak Lawn Lake
9600 East & West Shore
Drive (Lake Shore Park)

From the time Oak Lawn Lake was dug in the late nineteenth century, it has been one of the Village's most popular attractions.



Simpson House
9602 S 54th Ave
Built 1891

Built in 1891, the Simpson Home was formerly owned by early resident Charles Simpson. Charles was the son of John Simpson, an early settler and influential member of the community. It is one of the oldest structures left in the village.



Designated Site
9600 S 52nd Ave
Built 1919

In the 1940s, a widow and her son occupied this house. At the time, the widow worked as a cabinet maker according to the U.S. Census.

Sometime in the 1970s, the village condemned the building declaring it unsafe to live in. A neighbor purchased the building and brought it up to code. The current owner has been living in the house since 1990.



Ice House
9700 S Cook Ave
Built 1913

Before the days of modern refrigerators, families relied on ice to help keep food cool, especially in the warm summer months. The ice was obtained

from nearby bodies of water (such as a lake) and then sold in blocks to local residents. Numerous communities all over the United States would have a local business that sold ice, and Oak Lawn was no exception. The Ice House in our village was built around 1913, and as early as 1911 the Hilgendorf family used the property to sell blocks to locals. If a resident were interested in purchasing ice, they would leave a sign in their window indicating how much they wished to buy. The Ice House in Oak Lawn remained an important location for many years, but as technology improved its usefulness diminished. It is now a remnant from a time long passed, when reaching for a cold glass of milk was not as easy as opening the refrigerator door.



Homestead Barr
9306 S Central Ave
Built 1843

Born in Scotland in 1798, John Simpson immigrated to the United States sometime prior to the 1840s. In 1842, he arrived in the Oak Lawn area, where he purchased a large tract of land between present day Central Avenue

and 52nd Avenue, and 95th and 99th Streets. It was here that the Simpsons would develop their farm and build a home in 1858. Both John and his son Charles were active members in the young community, and proponents of bringing a Wabash Rail Line into Oak Lawn. After John's passing in 1880, the Simpson family continued to be an integral part of the village. In 1951, Ed and Dorothy Adomaitis purchased the structure and converted it into a tavern called the Homestead Barr. The family worked hard to make the business successful and by 1987 Ed Jr. had taken over operation of the establishment. In 1998, it became one of the first buildings recognized as an historic landmark by the Preservation Commission of Oak Lawn. Many residents who drive by may not realize that they are passing one of the oldest structures in the village, and an important remnant of our agricultural past.



Designated Site
9527 S LaCrosse Ave
Built 1940

George and Esther Hansen had this house built in 1940. At the time, George was working as an executive for a steel company. The architect who designed the house was Carl E. Heimbrodt and A.H. Ehrart was the builder.

The present owner bought the house from the Hansen estate in 1976 and has invested a good sum of money in ensuring the house remains faithful to its original design.



Auschwitz House
9625 East Shore Dr
Built 1894

Built by Fred Auschwitz prior to 1900, this home was originally located near 96th Street and Minnick Avenue. In 1910, it was moved to East Shore Drive, and became one of the earliest

earliest homes to be located near Oak Lawn Lake. Enid Auschwitz, Oak Lawn's only female resident to serve in World War I and daughter of Fred Auschwitz, lived here for a time. She served as a Navy typist from 1917-1918, and marched in the village's welcome home parade in 1919. Over the last century, the Auschwitz House has seen many different owners and undergone renovations to both its exterior and interior. Even through the transitions, it still retains a charm found in older structures, and provides a visible reminder of Oak Lawn's distant past.



Oak Lawn Farm House
4250 W 107th St
Built 1929

This home was once a farmhouse and at one time cows were kept in the present day garage which also has a

hayloft. Early on, a family that farmed this land also sold fruits and vegetables from the property. The property has changed hands several times over the years and at one point a fireman resided there with his eleven children. The current owner has lived here since 1972. It is believed this house is the oldest home on Oak Lawn east of Cicero Avenue.



Harker House
5317 W 95th St
Built 1929

The Harker House off 95th Street can be traced back to 1870, and today it is one of the few homes still directly located on the busy roadway. It was purchased by

Elmore (Ollie) Harker Sr. in 1940, and was originally located on Minnick Avenue before being moved to 95th Street in 1943. At the time he purchased the home, Ollie Harker was the Chief of the Oak Lawn Volunteer Fire Department, and had been involved with the organization since the 1920s. During the 1940s, he also served as Oak Lawn's Police Chief for a time, and remained an active member of the fire department until his death in 1962. His son Elmore (Al) Harker Jr. grew up in the house on 95th Street, and soon followed in his father's footsteps by joining the department in the early 1960s. By 1976, Al Harker Jr. had been promoted to Chief, and continued in this capacity until his retirement in 1989. The Harker House may seem out of place among the rows of new structures on 95th Street, yet it gives us an important connection to the history and development of public safety in the village.



Chapman House
9126 S 54th Ave
Built 1924

This house was once a farmhouse for the farm workers who worked the land. The current owners

petitioned for this residence to be designated historic in 2002.



Buehler House
9545 S Meade
Built 1938

John Buehler was a European immigrant who came to the United States in 1925, and he moved to Oak Lawn in 1938 with his wife Ada. Together, they constructed a home and

completed much of the work themselves which included pouring concrete, framing, plastering, plumbing and electrical. John dug the basement by hand and formed the hundreds of cinder blocks necessary for the foundation. He constructed the garage first, allowing the family to take up residence in its small attic. They cooked their food on a fuel oil stove and obtained water from a neighbor. While the garage was being completed, Ada planted fruit trees and a vegetable garden near the back of the property. Over the next several years, the rest of the home was finished with four bedrooms, a kitchen, study, family room, and dining room. After the completion of his home, John built several others in Oak Lawn before passing away in 1960. The Buehler Home is a wonderful example of building styles before the Village's rapid growth in the late 1940s, and testament to a husband and wife determined to build a life for their family.



O'Brien Courthouse
9530 S 53rd Ave
Built 1916

Known as Oak Lawn's first courthouse, it was not unusual to hold wedding ceremonies in the judge's library chambers as well as the sunken living room.

The roof line indicates Dutch Revival influences. The front door, oak trim and stair rails were imported from Spain.



Spitzer's gas station
5500 w 95th St
Built 1916

The American love affair with the automobile began in the early 20th century as declining costs

allowed more families to purchase a vehicle. With the rapid increase of cars, service stations appeared across the United States. Around 1912, Oak Lawn received its first fuel pump, which was installed just outside of Behrend's Hardware Store. Over the next few years, several full-fledged service stations, including Hablash's near 55th Avenue and 95th Street, were constructed. In 1933, Edward Spitzer purchased the business and renamed it Spitzer's Service Station. Several major remodeling projects, completed in the following decades, moved the building further back from 95th Street and added garage space. Edward's son Ron eventually takes over the stations management, and remained in this position until his passing in 1997. Now operated by Ron's sons Ken and Ron Jr., Spitzer's Service Station continues its tradition of serving Oak Lawn residents much the same as it has over the last eighty years.



Gaddis Home
9632 S Cook Ave
Built 1908

The Gaddis Home, built by William H. Gaddis and his wife Isabella in 1908, was one of the first residences on Cook Avenue.

The family had come to Oak Lawn in 1893 looking for a larger yard where they could garden. Gaddis's son, William B., took an avid interest in politics and served many years in public office as clerk (1912-1913), trustee (1914-1916) and mayor (1917-1920). Later, William B. and his wife Lucille left Oak Lawn for more than a decade to live in Chicago. In 1934, the couple returned to the village, and moved into the house on Cook Avenue that his parents had built nearly thirty years before. After his return, Gaddis once again served the community as a member of the Elementary Board of Education and as village clerk (1949-1952). Following his passing, the home was purchased by new owners and underwent various renovations. Today, it still retains much of its original style, and will always be connected to one of Oak Lawn's most politically active residents.



Tank Memorial
95th St & Sproat Ave
Dedicated 1937

Originally, this site contained a WWI tank. In 1947, it was replaced by this WWII M5 tank.



Keyhole House
5400 W 96th St
Built 1893

The Keyhole House is a classic example of the Victorian architecture. Its seven gables and four bay windows break up the 32' x 54' rectangular structure.

The house derives its name from the 7' high—4' wide keyhole shaped stain glass window which dominates the east exposure. The floral design of the window is composed of over 350 pieces of glass. The keyhole appears as the dominant accent of the ornate front stairwell.



Kolb House
9217 S 50th Ave

This house was once the residence of Oak Lawn's longest serving mayor, Ernie Kolb. Mayor Kolb served as mayor from 1977 until his death in 2003. The Kolb home today stands as a monument to a man who devoted much of his life in service of our village



O'Brien Home
9402 S 53rd Ct
Built 1893

This house is believed to have been built with timber from the World's Columbian Exposition. It was owned for many years by Frank O'Brien, Oak Lawn's first Village Marshall.



Designated Site
9515 S Brandt Ave
Built 1928

The first owner of this house was an Army pilot during WWII who survived the war, however, he and his wife were not able to keep up the property in their later years and had to sell.

The second owner's saw the home's possibilities, purchased the property, and set out to restore it to its original condition. It took them ten years to accomplish this task. They restored the plaster, original doors, and working fireplace. They also planted all the trees on the property in memory of the attacks of 9/11. The home's brickwork is of an unusual style.