



Western Springs Historical Society

Spring 2007

Preservation Awards

The Western Springs Historical Society invites nominations for its annual preservation awards to be given this September.

Since 1996, more than 45 structures, private residences as well as commercial and public buildings have been recognized for maintaining or preserving their historic or architectural integrity while undergoing restoration, renovation or expansion.

A panel of judges, who have backgrounds and experience in architecture, design and preservation, will determine the winners. Only the exterior as viewed from the street or sidewalk will be considered. Owners will be contacted prior to judging.

When selecting houses for an award, the judges look for those houses that have preserved or replaced the historic materials that characterize the property distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques.

Any well-maintained building that is at least 50 years old is eligible. This includes residences, commercial structures or public buildings. Buildings should reflect a variety of historical styles and represent as many Western Springs neighborhoods as possible.

Anyone may submit any number of nominations; however, they must be received no later than May 31, 2007. (See nomination form on reverse side of this newsletter)

Preservation Month

The Historical Society of Western Springs is participating with other groups around the country in a nationwide celebration of National Preservation Month, May 2007. "Making Preservation Work" is the theme of the month-long celebration, which is sponsored annually by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

This month long event celebrates the role of history in our lives and the contributions made by dedicated individuals in helping to preserve the tangible aspects of the heritage that has shaped us as a people.

Additionally this event highlights that historic preservation is an effective tool for managing growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering local pride and maintaining community character while enhancing livability. It is relevant for communities across the nation, both urban and rural, and for Americans of all ages, all walks of life and all ethnic backgrounds.

The Western Springs Historical Society is proud to join groups across the United States in recognizing and participating in this special month long observance.

For additional information please contact Elizabeth Arts or Elizabeth Trail, Preservation Coordinators at 246-9230.



A 2006 Award Winner - Cosimano Residence - 4640 Johnson Avenue

916 Hillgrove Avenue - Western Springs, Illinois 60558

246-9230

Historical Society Updates

Children's Museum

Children of all ages are invited to visit the Children's Museum on the third floor of the Tower. It is open every Saturday from 10:00 am – 12:00 noon. The Children's Museum will feature a variety of hands-on activities throughout the year. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Children's Museum Great for Group Tours!

The Children's Museum is also available for tours for primary school age groups. A tour can be designed specially for different groups. Some of the groups who have visited the Museum in previous years include Brownies, Cub Scouts, and primary grade school children. It can be educational and fun! For group tours, contact Nancy Pegram or Janet Helin.

Archiving Western Springs Homes

One of primary functions of the Western Springs Archives is to document the changing face of Western Springs for future generations. Over the years, numerous Western Springs homes have been razed. In many cases, no written history or image of these homes has been assembled. The Historical Society has been collecting photomontages of homes that have received demolition permits.

Society members Russ and Michele Nelson, of Nelson and Nelson Real Estate Photography, Western Springs, are providing the Archives with photomontages of houses that have been demolished as well as the new houses that are built. A special thanks to Russ and Michelle.

Western Springs Archives

The Archives of the Western Springs Historical society serves the community by documenting our village history and furnishing extensive research material for its residents. The staff is comprised entirely of volunteers and managed by Betty Howard, a long time Western Springs resident.

Information is obtained from various local publications and from within the community. This data is categorized, filed and microfiched. There are extensive files on Village history, including; Village administration, genealogy dating back to the 1800's, schools, businesses, churches, houses, along with a large collection of historical photographs. There is also a newly catalogued collection of over 2,000 historical slides that are available for loan.

The Archives are located on the second floor of Grand Avenue School (access at Grand Ave. entrance). It is open on Tuesday mornings from 9:00-12:00. For information call 246-9230.

Call for Docents

Any individuals who have a general interest in history or a specific interest in the development of Western Springs and would like to volunteer as a docent for the Western Springs Historical Society should call the Society at 246-9230.

Docents are given training and are asked to spend two hours on a Saturday at the Tower Museum. Please leave your name, address and phone number and state that you are interested in becoming a Docent.

Remembering the Houses of Western Springs

The Western Springs Historical Society and The Thomas Ford Library have joined forces to make the histories and photographs of selective Western Springs' houses accessible to the public via the internet. At this time, almost one hundred, nineteenth century houses are available for viewing. Also note that there is a place to leave comments, if you wish.

Thanks to funding from the Illinois State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State, and by using funds from the Library Services and Technology Act, a website has been developed to access a collection of photographs. The website address is:

www.westernspringshistory.org.

Remembering the Houses of Western Springs is just the start of a larger project. The Historical Society and The Library plan to continue this partnership to make more records of our village's history available on line. Long term plans include adding more house pictures, histories of community businesses, schools, churches and local government.

Anyone having historical photographs or other village information that they would be willing to add to the Historical Society's collection should contact the Society directly at 246-9230.

Archive Volunteers

Volunteers are needed on Tuesdays from 9-12 a.m. to help catalog the Historical Society donated items and articles. Please contact Betty Howard at 246-9230.

Historical Society Information

Battling Teardowns, Saving Neighborhoods

*The following are excerpts taken from an address by Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, Calif. June 28, 2006*

A growing disaster is tearing apart many of America's older neighborhoods. They're being devoured; one house at a time, here in the Bay Area, across California, and in scores of communities from coast to coast.

I'm talking about teardowns - the practice of purchasing and demolishing an existing house to make way for a new, much bigger house on the same site. Teardowns wreck neighborhoods. They spread through a community like a cancer, destroying the character and livability that are a neighborhood's lifeblood. I believe teardowns represent the biggest threat to America's older neighborhoods since the heyday of urban renewal and interstate highway construction during the 1950s and 60s.

Here's how it works: Developers and home-buyers look through desirable neighborhoods for a building lot that can lawfully accommodate a much bigger house than that which currently stands on it. The property is acquired, the existing house is torn down and a bigger house is constructed in its place. There are variations: Sometimes a large estate is leveled and subdivided to accommodate several new houses; in others, several smaller houses are cleared to make way for a single, massive new one.

It's a simple process, but it can totally transform the streetscape of a neighborhood and destroy its character. It's especially destructive in older and historic communities.

Neighborhood livability is diminished as trees are removed, backyards are eliminated, and sunlight is blocked by bulky new structures built right up to the property lines. Economic and social diversity are reduced as costly new "faux chateaux" replace more affordable houses - including the modest "starter homes" that our parents knew and that first-time homebuyers still search for today.

The ironic - and tragic - result is that teardowns wind up killing the very qualities that made the neighborhood attractive to newcomers in the first place.

In some places, teardowns are acceptable or even desirable. Replacing outdated and inefficient structures is sometimes necessary if a community is to remain

economically viable. But in recent years the pace of teardowns has amounted to an orgy of irrational destruction.

It's not uncommon for a demolished older home to be replaced with a new one that is three times as big as any other house on the block. These structures loom over their neighbors and break the established building patterns of the area. Front yards are often given over to driveways, and three- or four-car garages are the dominant elements in the façade. Floor plans are often oriented to private interior spaces, making the new houses look like fortresses that stand totally aloof from their surroundings.

Apart from their visual impact, teardowns can profoundly alter a neighborhood's economic and social environment. A rash of teardowns can cause property taxes to rise - and while this may be a good thing for communities in search of revenue, it can drive out moderate-income or fixed-income residents. Those who remain start to feel they've lost control of their neighborhood to developers and speculators. A house that once might have been praised as "charming and historic" now gets marketed as "older home on expansive lot" - which is realtor language for "teardown." Once that happens - once the value of an older house is perceived to be less than that of the land it's built on - the house's days are probably numbered. And sadly, the neighborhood's days as a viable historic enclave may be numbered too.

No one is saying that homebuyers shouldn't be able to alter or expand their home to meet their needs, just as no one is saying that older neighborhoods should be frozen in time like museum exhibits. A neighborhood is a living thing, and change is both inevitable and desirable. The challenge is to manage change so that it respects the character and distinctiveness that made these neighborhoods so appealing in the first place.

America's older neighborhoods are important chapters in the story of who we are as a nation and a people. Working together, we can keep that story alive. Working together, we can keep America's older and historic communities intact so that generations to come can live in them, learn from them, be sheltered and inspired by them - just as we are today.