



**VILLAGE OF OAK PARK
HISTORIC DISTRICT NOMINATION REPORT**

This form is for use in nominating Oak Park historic districts. Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Gunderson Historic District

other names/site number First Gunderson Development

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by Lexington Street, Fillmore Street,
Wenonah Avenue and Home Avenue

city or town Oak Park

state Illinois code IL county Cook Code 031 zip code 60304

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>59</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>59</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

4. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic/Single Dwelling Sub: _____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic/Single Dwelling Sub: _____

5. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

American Four-Square
Other: Colonial Revival
Other: Prairie School

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
roof Asphalt Shingle
walls Clapboarding, wood shingle **other**

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

6. Statement of Significance

Areas of Significance

Community Planning and Development
Architecture

Period of Significance

1905 to 1930

Architect/Builder

S.T. Gunderson and Sons, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

7. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Form Prepared By

name/title Doug Kaarre*

organization Village of Oak Park

date January 9, 2003

street & number 123 Madison Street

phone (708) 358-5417

city or town Oak Park

state IL zip code 60302

*This form was prepared in large part from the National Register nomination form for the Gunderson Historic District (Second Gunderson Development) prepared by Suzanne Germann and Lesley Gilmore of Gilmore Franzen Architects, 2002.

Property Owner(s)

name Multiple owners

street & number _____

telephone _____

city or town _____

state _____ zip code _____

5. Description of Development

The first Gunderson development is located on the south side of Oak Park south of the Eisenhower Expressway. The area is roughly bounded by Lexington Street on the north, Fillmore Street on the south, Home Avenue on the east and Wenonah Avenue on the west. The area consists of 28 homes on Wenonah Avenue and 31 homes on Home Avenue, for a total of 59 single-family homes. The area was developed in 1905 by S. T. Gunderson and Sons. It is referred to as the first Gunderson development in Oak Park; it was followed by S.T. Gunderson & Sons second development on S. Cuyler, S. Ridgeland, S. Elmwood and Gunderson Avenues between Madison and Harrison Streets, constructed between 1906 and 1920. The second Gunderson development was designated as the Gunderson Historic District in 2002. All 59 of the homes are considered to be contributing properties to the character of the district.¹ Although no permit information was available for 3 of the homes, all are believed to be part of the Gunderson development.

All of the Gunderson homes are American Foursquare types constructed in 1905. They are individualized with original detailing of Colonial Revival influences, such as wide and thin porch columns with Ionic and Doric capitals and returns on the front gable ends, and Prairie School influences, such as wide eaves and square porch posts and low-pitched hip roofs. Although massing is consistent on all the homes, there are several variations of detail on the homes throughout the development. Roof types vary between hipped roofs with hipped central dormers (25), hipped roofs with gabled central dormers (15) or houses with front gables (18). One house has a hipped roof with no dormer. The homes were originally clad with wood clapboards, wood shingles, or a combination thereof. Wood shingles were the typical roofing material at the time.

The American Four Square played a critical role in speculative developments throughout the United States; they were basic, comfortable homes affordable by the middle-class from 1895 through 1925.² The typical American Four Square home in the development is approximately 24 feet wide and varies from 28 to 32 feet deep, not including the front porch. This floor plate is slightly longer than the square floor plan of the standard Four Square. However, the building mass is the prototypical Four Square cube. The remainder of the features are representative of the American Four Square as defined by Alan Gowans in *The Comfortable House*: “two stories high, set on a raised basement with the first floor approached by steps, a verandah running the full width of the first story, capped by a low pyramidal roof that usually contains at least a front dormer, and an interior plan of four nearly equal sized rooms per floor plus side stairwell.”³ The front porch typically has only three columns, though some have two or four. The front entrance openings are typically asymmetrically arranged. The homes in the development are typically 2-1/2 stories high.

The American Four Square houses in the development are illustrative of the variety of secondary styles that often accompany the style. Most have strong horizontal lines, restraint in ornamentation, and wide eaves. Some of these features are strong enough to be considered the influence of the Prairie School style. Some are graced with a classical flair, often manifested in Ionic capitals on round porch columns. This building style is considered a distinctive new building style from the turn of the 20th century. A common decorative window type featured in the homes is one with wood muntins forming diamond patterns or geometric shapes. This same decorative window was used again in the second Gunderson development,

¹ Based on field surveys performed by Village Staff on June 12, September 25, and November 11, 2002 and HPC discussion on November 14, 2002. Artificial siding does not negate contributing status.

² James S. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, “Builder Style: America’s Little Houses,” *Old House Journal*, September/October, 1990, p. 45-49.

³ Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture 1890-1930* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986).

along with art glass windows. The first Gunderson development did not incorporate art glass as prevalently as in the second development. However, when art glass was used, it was found in the transom of the central window of the front first floor bay and/or the south first floor bay, or at the hall or closet window next to the front entry door. Art glass windows were only visible on 6 homes, while approximately 31 homes exhibited decorative windows.

Many of the homes have been altered and modernized similarly. 28 of the full-width front porches were enclosed, most likely in the 1920s. This enclosure typically consists of ribbons of tall casement windows set on the original low porch wall. The majority of the extant original casements have vertical divided lites in a three-over-two, three-over-one or six-over-one pattern. Although these are later alterations, they are historic and are seen consistently throughout the development. There has been a great deal of artificial siding applied to the homes.⁴ Of the 59 homes in the development, 12 retain their original wall cladding. One home has been clad in stucco. The homes were originally constructed for middle-class first-time homeowners. The district remains middle-class. Although the artificial siding and enclosed porches on some of the buildings is not original, it does not diminish the integrity of the structures. The building massing, fenestration and detailing remain intact.

The majority of the lots in the development are 37.5 x 150 feet.⁵ One house on Home was constructed on a double lot. The typical front yard setback is 15 feet. A 16-foot wide alley separates the blocks. The alleys provide access to the garages at the rear of the property, none of which were built simultaneously with the homes.

A local newspaper described these homes at the time of construction as “colonial type” and listed the names and addresses of 50 new homeowners “all being from Chicago.”⁶ The original intent of this subdivision was to have some homes on double lots. From reviewing the building permits for these properties, it is evident that all lots were developed later that same year.⁷ The fifty-nine houses in this subdivision are similar in style to, but smaller than, the later (second Gunderson) subdivision. These homes ranged in selling price from \$3,750 to \$4,000.⁸

The most recognizable enduring historic features of the development are summarized as follows:

1. Green parkways with mature deciduous trees regularly spaced.
2. Equal setbacks (front, side and rear) for each property.
3. Consistent rhythm established by items #1 and #2 above.
4. Consistent building massing.
5. Consistent porch sizes and depths.
6. Consistent building height.

All 59 properties have been classified as contributing structures despite alterations to five specific homes at 1015, 1023, 1031 and 1105 Home and 1046 Wenonah. These homes do retain their basic form and shape, despite missing or added porches or window alterations. The owners of these homes are encouraged to restore the homes back to the original design.

⁴ “Artificial siding” includes asbestos siding, vinyl clapboards, aluminum siding, and asphalt siding or other composite materials.

⁵ Based upon Sidwell map.

⁶ *The Oak Park Reporter-Argus*, May 19, 1906, p. 8.

⁷ April 3, 1905, June 14, 1905, August 18, 1905, and November 27, 1905 were the only dates that permits were pulled by S.T. Gunderson and Sons for this subdivision. Numerous permits were pulled on each date.

⁸ *Oak Park Reporter Argus*, May 19, 1906.

1001 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, decorative windows, porch alterations including new columns, front gable.

1005 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, decorative windows, art glass windows, front gable roof.

1007 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, wood windows, 1 decorative and 2 art glass on front first floor, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center. *Ray Kroc Boyhood Home*

1011 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, enclosed front porch, aluminum soffits, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1015 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood or composite board siding, enclosed front porch with alterations, decorative windows, front gable roof.

1017 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, decorative windows, Ionic porch columns, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1019 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, decorative windows, aluminum soffits, Ionic porch columns, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1023 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt horizontal siding, major alterations, hipped roof with no dormer.

1025 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, square porch posts, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1029 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding on the first floor and wood shingles on the second floor, decorative windows, art glass windows, Doric porch columns, front gable roof.

1031 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, second floor addition over front porch, Doric porch columns, front gable roof.

1035 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, aluminum soffits, square porch posts, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1039 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Aluminum siding, decorative windows, aluminum soffits, Ionic porch columns, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1041 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, vinyl windows, art glass windows, Ionic porch columns, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1043 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, vinyl windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1047 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Composite siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1101 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, vinyl windows, front gable roof.

1105 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, second floor addition over front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1109 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1111 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, square porch posts, decorative windows, flat front gable roof.

1115 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, enclosed front porch, front gable roof.

1119 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, Doric porch columns, decorative windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1121 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1125 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, vinyl windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1127 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, decorative windows, front gable roof.

1131 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, Ionic porch columns, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1133 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1137 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1139 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, aluminum soffits, decorative windows, front gable roof.

1143 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1147 Home Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, large wood brackets at front eaves, art glass windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1012 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1016 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1018 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, Doric porch columns, decorative windows, front gable roof.

1022 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1024 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt and aluminum siding, square porch posts, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1028 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, Doric porch columns, decorative windows, front gable roof.

1030 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, Doric porch columns, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1034 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding on first floor and wood shingles on second floor, decorative windows, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1036 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Aluminum siding, enclosed front porch, front gable roof.

1040 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, square porch posts, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1042 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, Doric porch posts, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1046 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, art glass windows, no front porch, front gable roof.

1100 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding, Doric porch columns, decorative windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1104 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1106 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1110 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, decorative windows, square porch posts, circular gable window, front gable roof.

1112 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Stucco siding on first floor and dormer, wood shingles on second floor, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1114 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Wood clapboard siding on first floor, wood shingles on second floor, decorative windows, Doric porch columns, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1118 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1122 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, elevator lift extending from front porch adjacent to stoop, front gable roof.

1124 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, two-story bay on front elevation, half-width enclosed front porch with Ionic columns, decorative windows, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1126 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1130 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1132 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, Doric porch columns, front gable roof.

1136 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Vinyl siding, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1138 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Asphalt siding on first floor, wood shingles on second floor, decorative windows, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with gabled dormer at center.

1142 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Stucco cladding, decorative windows, enclosed front porch, hipped roof with hipped dormer at center.

1146 Wenonah Avenue – CONTRIBUTING

Aluminum siding, Doric porch columns, decorative windows, front gable roof.

6. Significance of Development

The first Gunderson development is a prominent subdivision in south Oak Park, boasting middle-class homes in the American Four Square style that was in national vogue in the early 1900s. The sameness of house style, identical setbacks, and other common features of this subdivision foreshadow the “cookie-cutter” subdivisions later in the century. This development was also the first large-scale development for the firm S.T. Gunderson and Sons in Oak Park. Their second subdivision was listed on the National Register and designated an Oak Park historic district in 2002. The period of significance begins in 1905, the year the homes were constructed, and continues through 1930 to incorporate the early modifications that occurred. The first Gunderson development is being combined with the second Gunderson development into one historic district in two locations. The second Gunderson development was designated

as the Gunderson Historic District in 2002. Together, the two developments will be referred to as the Gunderson Historic District.

Community Planning and Development

The first Gunderson development was built as a new suburban community that catered to the middle class family. It was designed to provide homeownership to a burgeoning middle class, easy access to employment opportunities in the City of Chicago, and a safe haven in which to raise a family. The Gunderson firm built the area by means of a proven successful formula used by previous and contemporary developers.

The Gunderson Family and Its Business

S.T. Gunderson and Sons represents a firm started by successful Norwegian immigrants. Severt T. Gunderson came to the United States in 1848 at the age of nine. At 18 he went into business as a builder, and quickly acquired important timber and mill holdings, all of which were destroyed by fire in 1875. He soon started a second business, manufacturing doors and sashes, which he operated with his son Seward. This business was also destroyed by fire. In 1885 Severt and his two sons formed the firm of S.T. Gunderson and Sons, “homebuilders”⁹ and real estate investors. Severt also was associated in the firm of John A. Gauger & Company, who manufactured and shipped doors and window sash throughout the United States.¹⁰ Severt remained closely tied to his ethnic roots. He married another first-generation Norwegian immigrant, Emily Olsen, and they lived in a Norwegian neighborhood in Chicago, where they spoke their native language and participated in local Scandinavian organizations.¹¹

Severt and Emily had two sons, Seward and George, both of whom worked in the family business. Seward Miles Gunderson was born in Chicago on February 28, 1866. He was educated in public schools and at the Bryant and Stratten Business College in Chicago. In October 1894 he married Abigail K. Campbell, the daughter of a prosperous Chicago contractor, and had four children (Miles, Doris, Virginia, and Kathryn) and eight grandchildren. He joined his father in the lumber business in 1883¹² and became the managing partner in 1893.¹³ George Gunderson was born in Chicago in 1863. He was also educated in public schools and at the Bryant and Stratten Business College of Chicago. He married Julia Jacobs in 1887 and had two daughters, four grandchildren, and four great grandchildren at the time of his death in 1945. His career began in his father’s lumber company in 1881. He was later the manager of W.J. Frawley and Company, lumber inspectors. George joined his father and brother in business in 1885. In 1899 he organized the Acme Steel Company, Inc. and was treasurer and general manager until 1924.¹⁴ Although George was a partner in the firm of S.T. Gunderson and Sons, he was not as active in the firm as his brother, Seward.

Seward Gunderson followed the pattern of many first-generation immigrants by assimilating into the American culture. In 1907, he and his family moved to Oak Park, where they had built a large house in the heart of the second Gunderson development. Seward consciously constructed himself as an example for his neighbors to emulate.¹⁵ He was a prominent member

⁹ According to Seward’s daughter Virginia, Seward coined the phrase “homebuilder” in contrast to the term “housebuilder” as a reflection of his commitment to the family. As related to a meeting of the Gunderson Society, September 11, 1978.

¹⁰ “Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Representative Men of Chicago,” Volume 2, 1892, page 692, Chicago Historical Society Collection.

¹¹ Kathryn Elizabeth Ratcliff, “The Making of a New Middle-Class Culture: Family and Community in a Midwest Suburb, 1890 – 1920” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1990), 75. Kathryn is a granddaughter of Seward’s daughter Kathryn Gunderson Ratcliff.

¹² *Oak Leaves*, July 13, 1950.

¹³ “70 Years Young: Seward Gunderson,” *Oak Parker*, February 29, 1936, p. 37.

¹⁴ *Oak Leaves*, January 11, 1945, 47.

¹⁵ Ratcliff, 75.

of the community and involved in social affairs as a member of many organizations: Oak Park's first zoning board; president of Oak Park Republican Club and delegate of National Republican convention in 1944; Oak Park Chamber of Commerce; Chicago Real Estate Board of Underwriters; Chicago Athletic Association; charter member of the Oak Park Country Club; treasurer of the park district of Oak Park from 1912 to 1920¹⁶; secretary of his brother's firm, the Acme Steel Company from 1899 to 1903; Metropolitan Lodge, Oriental Consistory; Knights Templar and Medinah Temple.¹⁷

Kathryn, Seward's youngest daughter, recalled that when a family from the "old Country" bought a house in her father's subdivision, they received a lesson in normative suburban behavior: women should wear hats, not babushkas; they should carry a pocketbook whenever they appeared in public; and the whole family should attend church on Sundays. Gunderson even encouraged homebuyers to bring their parents to the house contract closing so they could learn the proper decorum for suburban visits.¹⁸

The Village of Oak Park building permits for Gunderson homes indicate one aspect of the style of the operation of the firm. Large numbers of permits for separate buildings were pulled simultaneously. The homes were built essentially one block at a time. This approach implies that this was an assembly line sort of construction. The firm took great steps to facilitate a more efficient and modern method of construction.

S.T. Gunderson and Sons continued to develop homes in Oak Park and Chicago through the 1920s. Between 1905 and 1920 Gunderson subdivided several tracts of land in south Oak Park and built, financed, and sold more than 600 single family homes for prices ranging from \$4,000 to \$12,000. The Gunderson firm subdivided an Oak Park neighborhood along Columbian and Fair Oaks Avenues north of Augusta Street in 1922; and the Greenfield subdivision at Harlem Avenue and Division Street in 1925. The firm continued to subdivide land in Chicago's Garfield Park neighborhood, and in Elmwood Park north of Oak Park. According to Seward Gunderson's obituary and an oral history with his daughter, Kathryn Gunderson Ratcliff, the firm acted as a realtor in these later subdivisions rather than as a builder.¹⁹

Oak Park History

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was the catalyst for a population explosion in Oak Park. The population increased from approximately 500 people in 1871 to almost 10,000 people in 1902, when Oak Park severed its ties with Cicero Township and was incorporated as a self-governing municipality. The population continued to grow, doubling every ten years to nearly 40,000 people in 1920. Real estate development and building construction was at a new high between 1906 and 1917. Between 300 and 400 building permits for new homes were issued annually until a peak was reached in 1915. Construction declined until 1918 when only 44 new home permits were issued.²⁰

The most dramatic growth in the early 20th Century occurred south of Madison Street. By 1915 one-third of Oak Park's population lived south of Madison Street.²¹ This area, known for its

¹⁶ Park District of Oak Park, Meeting Minutes, 1912-1920.

¹⁷ *Oak Leaves*, July 13, 1950.

¹⁸ Lee Brooke, *Yesterday When I Was Younger...Oak Park, River Forest Oral History*, (Privately printed, 1989), 122.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, and an oral history with his daughter, Kathryn Gunderson Ratcliff, see Lee Brooke, *Yesterday when I was Younger*, 1989.

²⁰ Jean Guarino, *Oak Park: A Pictorial History* (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 1988), 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

small lots and mass-produced homes on the least expensive land, was the last section of the village to be settled.²²

The new south side residents were people from Chicago, primarily men who were in business for themselves. Although self-employed, they were in Oak Park's lower income bracket.²³ There was no visible line dividing the north and south sides of the village, yet there were definite distinctions between the two neighborhoods. There were conflicts involving social, economic, and political issues that threatened to divide the community. Many south side residents were dissatisfied with village services and favored annexation to Chicago. Many editorials in the *Oak Leaves* addressed the issues of annexation and the need to provide better services to the south side of the village. In January 1909 an *Oak Leaves* article noted, "by next summer one-third of the total vote of Oak Park will be south of Madison Street."²⁴ This same article mentioned the improvements made to the south side: new school buildings, branch libraries, and water service. The question of annexation appeared on the ballot in 1910 and 1911 and was defeated both times.²⁵

The settlement of the south side of Oak Park has been credited to two turn-of-the-century builders, Thomas H. Hulbert and Seward Gunderson. Both of these builders bought large sections of the "south prairie" and subdivided the land into tracts to construct affordable housing for the workingman and his family. *The Oak Park Reporter Argus* described the building boom:

"Three Hundred New Houses Will Make Village of Prairie Land. The desirability of Oak Park as a residence suburb is becoming more manifest to the people of Chicago and other sections every day ... A few years ago the ... land was one large prairie, with the blue grass waving in the summer breeze. Now the whole territory is dotted with handsome residences."²⁶

Hulbert and Gunderson were constructing modest homes that cost from \$3,000 to \$10,000. The houses were bought as fast as they were built and the real estate values in that area increased rapidly.²⁷ Both builders highlighted the available convenient transportation, from these developments to Chicago, in their advertisements. This attention paid to transportation by both builders demonstrates the development pressure that came from those who wished to move from Chicago to a suburban setting.

The Gundersons established several subdivisions in Chicago and Oak Park between 1889 and 1925.²⁸ The earliest subdivisions were on the west side of Chicago. The first Gunderson development in Oak Park was the Gunderson and Gaugers addition, platted in 1890, located on Home and Wenonah Avenues between Harrison Street and Roosevelt Road. Gunderson owned this land for fifteen years, waiting for a five-cent railroad fare to Chicago before commencing construction. With his own funds, Gunderson constructed a station of the Metropolitan elevated train line at nearby Maple Avenue for the convenience of the new residents.²⁹ The houses were quickly sold once construction began in 1905. Gunderson mainly developed the land on Home and Wenonah Avenues between Lexington and Filmore Streets. The exception was seven homes constructed in 1905 at 900, 902, 912, 916 and 920 Wenonah Avenue and 915 and 931 Home Avenue. While several of these Gunderson homes are

²² Arthur Evans Le Gacy, *Improvers and Preservers: A History of Oak Park, Illinois, 1833-1940* (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967), 139.

²³ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁴ *Oak Leaves*, January 30, 1909.

²⁵ Guarino, 68.

²⁶ *Oak Park Reporter Argus*, May 19, 1906.

²⁷ Gertrude Fox Hoagland, *Historical Survey of Oak Park, Illinois* (Oak Park Public Library, 1937).

²⁸ Atlas of Township of Cicero, 1917, the *Oak Leaves*, and building permits.

²⁹ *Oak Park Reporter Argus*, May 19, 1906.

identical to those on the two blocks to the south, they are not being included in the historic district. This is due to the lack of continuity of building type which separates them from the first development. Most of the two blocks to the north and south of the Gunderson homes were developed over the next 10 to 15 years. The 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows no structures on the southernmost block of this subdivision. Review of permits of this block reveals that the Gunderson firm did not build here.

Advertisement

In 1905, S.T. Gunderson and Sons' first development sold out in less than fourteen months, its success no doubt due in part to an extensive advertising campaign. To publicize Gunderson homes Seward Gunderson issued postcards, brochures, and a monthly magazine/pamphlet entitled "Homes: A Magazine for Rent Payers."³⁰ In his literature, Gunderson portrayed himself as a public servant advancing the cause of traditional virtue. He explained in his brochures that he was able to pass substantial savings on to his customers because of his extensive holdings in the lumber industry. According to his promotional material, the provision of affordable single-family residences was not only an act of good business but also a mission of public service.³¹

The advertisements continued, possibly more standardized, for the sales of the second development. The Gunderson firm had a regular weekly ad in the local newspaper, the *Oak Leaves*. The advertisements touted the benefits of home ownership in lieu of leasing, the benefits of life in the suburbs, the quality of the homes and construction, and the easy accessibility to Chicago. Gunderson endeavored to coax Chicago residents to purchase homes in the suburbs. Potential homeowners were invited to "investigate Gunderson's wonderland of superior modern homes."³² The *Oak Leaves* frequently dedicated a column to S.T. Gunderson and Sons' reports of recent sales in their subdivision. The list included the address of the property purchased and the name and occupation of the new owner.³³

Thomas Hulbert handled advertisements similarly for his subdivision just blocks away on South Clinton Street and South Kenilworth Avenue between Madison and Harrison Streets. The two builders were obviously in competition for the same clientele. The advertisements were often nearly identical, demonstrating the developers' similar perception of the market. (See attachments for examples.)

Although other builders were using similar sales methods and constructing homes for first-time homeowners, Gunderson stood out because of his social involvement. Gunderson moved his family to a residence in the center of his own subdivision. His brother George, also a member of the firm, lived across the street. The Gundersons were setting the example for future homeowners. Both brothers were very active in Oak Park society.

Other Developers

Although the Gunderson firm was innovative, they were not the only firm in Oak Park to use modern mass marketing techniques, advertising, and the appeal of Oak Park churches and schools. Firms such as E.A. Cummings Co., Fred A. Hill, and realtor Frank June had engaged in similar techniques for years and contemporaries like Thomas Hulbert also employed such techniques.³⁴ Hulbert is often referenced in the same context as Gunderson as their contemporary developments were just blocks from each other. Hulbert employed similar advertising techniques as Gunderson did, with weekly advertisements in *Oak Leaves*. Hulbert

³⁰ Ratcliff, 73.

³¹ Ibid., 74.

³² *Oak Leaves*, undated clipping.

³³ See *Oak Leaves*, October 8, 1910.

³⁴ See *Halley's Pictorial Oak Park*, 1898, and Cummings' ad in *Oak Leaves*, June 25, 1906.

advertised his firm's "Built on Honor Houses" in the local *Oak Leaves*, applying the same themes as Gunderson. (See attachments for examples.) Common advertisement enticements included: the quality of workmanship, a reasonable price, a ban on apartment construction, and the liberating value of home ownership. One of the ads for Hulbert homes offered to send a free booklet to potential customers. Although no copies are known to remain at this time, the existence of Hulbert's booklet indicates a similar approach to the Gunderson firm's marketing effort.³⁵

Despite similarities with competitors, the Gunderson firm set itself apart by melding good products and coordinated marketing with real acts of community involvement and community building. By living in the subdivision and becoming pillars of the community, the Gundersons came to represent the public image of successful middle-class businessmen.

Other homebuilders in south Oak Park purchased advertisements in the *South Oak Park Directory*. Their ads included photos of American Four Square style homes almost identical to those being built by S.T. Gunderson and Sons. Geo. H. Bartlett, a contractor and builder at 1027 Wesley, used the same photo to advertise his services as Paul Schulte of 947 Wesley did.³⁶

This mass marketing technique was not unique to Oak Park or to this time period. As early as the 1880s, real estate developer S.E. Gross developed several working-class subdivisions throughout Chicago. Gross used marketing techniques that Gunderson and his contemporaries would use a few years later. Gross's office churned out colorful pamphlets, catalogs, and broadsides, which were freely distributed to interested customers. The publications emphasized the superiority of homeownership. Gross used his advertising campaigns to idealize the home as the "embodiment of stability, moral development, dedication to family, communion with nature, and protection from the vices of the city."³⁷ In Gross's subdivisions, the owner had the choice of building his own home or contracting Gross to construct the house from a choice of more than 400 house plans. Gross minimized the construction costs by buying mass-produced materials in bulk and building from standardized plans. Many of the house plans Gross used were available in published catalogues.³⁸ Similar to Gunderson, Gross became a director and shareholder of the Railroad in order to influence the routes, schedules, and fares of the lines to his subdivisions. When Gross developed a planned community west of Chicago (later named Brookfield), he spent \$5,000 to construct a train station on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad.³⁹

This development compared to other Gunderson Developments

Most of S.T. Gunderson & Sons housing developments in Chicago were in the West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago and centered around Pulaski (4000 West) and what is now the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290). These earlier developments foreshadowed Gunderson's later method of choosing a lot size, building size, and building style appropriate for the place and time. In 1889, the firm constructed simple one-and-a-half story brick gable-front cottages with front porches on Colorado and Lexington Streets between 43rd and 44th Avenues.⁴⁰ Colorado

³⁵ Gilmore and Lipo, 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷ Emily Clark and Patrick Ashley, "The Merchant Prince of Cornwall," *Chicago History* (December 1992): 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁰ Another area, on the west side of 43rd Avenue, between Madison and Harrison Streets, developed by Gunderson in 1889, was apparently demolished to make room for the expressway. All four of these Chicago area development sites discussed herein were identified on the Cicero Township Plat Map of 1917. They were cursorily surveyed by Lesley Gilmore on July 5, 2001.

Street was demolished for the construction of the expressway in the late 1950s; however, 8-10 of these buildings still remain on Lexington Street.

Approximately twenty similar brick cottages built by the Gunderson firm in 1901 remain on the south side of Lexington between 43rd and 44th Avenues. A 1903 Gunderson development on Harrison and Colorado Streets, between 40th and 42nd Avenues, again used the same simple brick gable-front cottage; approximately one dozen of these remain on the south side of Harrison Street. They are visible from the Eisenhower Expressway.

The second Gunderson development in Oak Park, located between Harrison and Madison Streets, and Gunderson and South Ridgeland Avenues, was constructed shortly after the first Oak Park subdivision.⁴¹ Gunderson located this subdivision directly north of the Metropolitan Garfield elevated train line, with a station on Gunderson Avenue that connected Oak Park to Chicago. The firm located two branch offices in the core of the neighborhood – one at South Elmwood Avenue and Harrison Street, and one at South Elmwood Avenue and Adams Street. This second subdivision was prominently advertised in the local papers, with weekly advertisements in the *Oak Leaves*.

The lots of the second development are consistently 130 feet deep and 40 feet wide. The development has a 15-foot wide alley to allow access to garages at the rear of the property. Although the majority of the homes have garages, they were not constructed at the time the house was built. All the houses have a uniform setback of 25 feet.

The administration of the firm changed between the first and second developments. S.T. Gunderson and Sons is listed as the owner of the properties on the permits for the first development while the contractor listed is Pellingier Brothers or W.A. Pellingier. The second development lists S.T. Gunderson and Sons as both owner and contractor. The permits of both developments were handled in a similar fashion. In the first development numerous permits were applied for on a single day; only four dates in 1905 are listed for permits for the entire development.⁴² Essentially the development was constructed one block at a time. The Gundersons used the same method of permit application for the second development; multiple properties were listed on a single permit.

Architecture

The architectural and construction style and details were paramount to the Gunderson development formula, just as they were to previous and contemporary developers. The Gunderson firm used popular styles that connoted comfort, stability, and durability to the middle class homeowner. The homes were built as American Four Squares with Prairie School and Colonial Revival style influences.

The American Four Square

The American Four Square was one of the most popular home types at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Its popularity derived from its highly functional plan and restrained ornamentation, which was the trend after the 1880s. The home is generally two stories high, is set on a raised basement with the first floor approached by steps, has a full-width front porch, and is capped with a pyramidal roof that usually contains at least a front dormer. The interior plan is of four nearly equally sized rooms per floor with a side stairway.⁴³ The house takes many of its characteristics from the designer homes of the period. The wide eaves,

⁴¹ This second development was listed on the National Register and designated an Oak Park historic district in 2002.

⁴² Permits are dated April 3, 1905, June 14, 1905, August 18, 1905, and November 27, 1905.

⁴³ Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 84.

low-sloped roof, porch support piers, and horizontal emphasis are borrowed from the Prairie School style. Its sense of solidity and bulk keeps the house grounded.

Other sub-styles provide interesting detail to the Gunderson Four Square. The *Colonial Revival* influence is evident in the Doric and Ionic columned porches, pyramidal front gable dormers, and front porch balustrades. Oak Park is the home of many landmark examples of the *Prairie* style. Vernacular examples were spread widely by pattern books and popular magazines; they were common in early 20th century suburbs throughout the country. Most were built between 1905 and 1915.⁴⁴ The Prairie homes in the Gunderson district are of the variety sometimes known as the Prairie Box. This subtype has a low-pitched hipped roof, symmetrical façade, wide eaves, hipped dormers, full-width front porches, and double-hung windows. The entrance, which is either centered or off-center, is the focal point of the façade. This was the earliest Prairie form and developed into the most common vernacular version.⁴⁵

The American Four Square was most popular in the suburbs as a middle class home. Four Square homes were generally not architect-designed but constructed by contractors or builders in tract style subdivisions. In Oak Park the Four Square was the prevalent type on the south side of the village. In contrast, many homes on the north side of the village were designed by architects for upper-middle class residents. The area south of Madison Street was developed by several builders who borrowed elements from houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, George Maher, and E.E. Roberts to incorporate into their Four Square homes.⁴⁶

Ray Kroc

Known to billions of people as the founder of the McDonald's Restaurant chain, Ray Kroc got his start in life as a resident of Oak Park. Kroc was born in Chicago in 1902 to parents Louis and Rose Kroc. He moved with his family to Oak Park soon after, and by 1908 was living at 1007 Home Avenue in the first Gunderson subdivision. Ray Kroc grew up in this home with his brother and sister, attending Oak Park schools Lincoln Elementary and Oak Park & River Forest High School. He left school at age fifteen after his sophomore year to become a Red Cross ambulance driver. He was admitted to the Red Cross Ambulance Corps by falsifying his age.⁴⁷ As the war was over, he returned to Oak Park and attended high school for one semester. He quit school for good and became a jazz pianist playing with orchestras and bands, as well as musical director for radio station WGES in Chicago. One of his discoveries was Sam and Henry, who later became Amos 'n' Andy.⁴⁸

Ray Kroc married at age 20 and took a job with Lily Tulip Cup Co. He sold paper cups for several years before moving to Florida to sell real estate. He returned to Oak Park in 1926 and went back to selling paper cups until 1937. After that, he became the exclusive distributor for a soda fountain machine that could mix five milkshakes at a time.⁴⁹ In 1954 he met the McDonald brothers, who ran a restaurant in California. He was impressed by their success and began to franchise their restaurant by opening the first McDonald's franchise in Des Plaines at age 52.⁵⁰ He bought out the McDonald brothers in 1961 for \$2.7 million and went on to create the largest restaurant chain in the world.

⁴⁴ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984), 440.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Dull, "The Domestic Architecture of Oak Park, Illinois: 1900 – 1930" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973) 12.

⁴⁷ *Current Biography*, "Kroc, Raymond A.," 1973, p. 230.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁴⁹ "McDonald's founder Ray Kroc. Chicago Native Dies From Heart Failure at 81," *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1984.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Ray Kroc lived in Oak Park for almost half his life, and grew up in the first Gunderson development. According to the Oak Park Directories he still lived in Oak Park in 1939 at age 38. It wasn't until he was 52 years old that Ray Kroc became a millionaire with the McDonald's restaurant franchise. Following his success with the McDonald's restaurant, he moved to San Diego, where he owned the San Diego Padres baseball team for many years. In 1971 he received an honorary diploma from Oak Park & River Forest High School, and he donated \$7.5 million to Oak Park charitable organizations in 1972.⁵¹ He died at age 81 in 1984.

Conclusion

The continued success of the first Gunderson development demonstrates how effectively this builder was able to appeal to the upwardly mobile middle class families seeking homes in Oak Park. Using enticing direct marketing, advertising, and personal salesmanship, the Gunderson firm combined the cost-effectiveness of a large-scale development with the intimacy of choosing a new home from a neighbor. This method of marketing reflected a trend, as contemporary developers in Oak Park were using similar methods to coax potential homeowners from Chicago. The variety of custom-designed features offered by S.T. Gunderson and Sons appealed to the owner's sense of individualism. The Gunderson Homes were the result of the skillful and calculated blend of individualized choices within a framework of a large economy of scale that reduced the consumer's costs. This enabled a working family to buy a sizeable sturdy home for approximately \$3,750 to \$4,000. The Gunderson home is easily identifiable today and recognized as a desirable home. Current real estate ads boast both Gunderson and "Gunderson style" homes located on beautiful tree-lined streets. The enduring association with quality design and construction serve as testimony to Seward Gunderson's philosophy of building quality homes that would last.

⁵¹ "OPRFHS 'Small Potatoes' for Hamburger King," Oak Leaves, January 18, 1984.

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