



123 MADISON STREET, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS 60302

HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION REPORT



**Edward and Caroline McCready House
231 N. Euclid Avenue**

**Preliminary Determination of Eligibility approved by the
Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission on January 14, 2010**

Designated by Village Ordinance on March 15, 2010

Edward and Caroline McCready House

231 N. Euclid Avenue

Built: 1907
Architect: Spencer and Powers
Builder: S. N. Nelson

The 1907 Edward McCready House is located at 231 N. Euclid Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois, and faces east. The two-story Prairie style brick structure is rectangular in plan, with a covered breezeway to the three-car garage that sits perpendicular to the house facing north. The house and garage sit at the north edge of the lot. The horizontality of the structure is accentuated by use of Roman brick. The low-pitched hip roof is covered with clay tiles and features wide overhanging eaves, wood soffits and wide fascia, shed dormers and a wide brick chimney at the south end of the house. The majority of the windows are casement windows with art glass that are arranged in horizontal bands. All window and door openings are painted wood with wood frames. A three-car brick garage sits on the north edge of the property facing Erie Street. The garage has a low-pitched clay tile roof with wide overhanging eaves and three individual bay openings. The doors are painted to look like the original wood doors. The house is bordered on the east by a low brick wall matching the house capped with limestone, with planters flanking the five steps up from the sidewalk; a six-foot brick wall extends west from the garage along the sidewalk.



The east (front) façade features massive central bay with an off-center entrance bay extending out further. A carved limestone entry surround and lintel establish an Arts &

Crafts motif that is repeated with slight variations throughout the interior of the house in the art glass, carved plaster moldings, and painted trim.¹ A set of three vertical art glass windows with transoms is to the north of the entrance bay on the second floor providing light to the interior stair tower. A horizontal band of four casement art glass windows sits directly above the entrance bay. Limestone banding runs around the house at the base of the second floor windows. Additional banding of casement art glass windows occurs to the south of the entrance bay on the first floor; to the north are to individual art glass windows and a pair of casement art glass windows, all with limestone sills. A small shed dormer clad in wood shingles sits north of the central bay.

The south (side) elevation is dominated by a wide brick chimney that is centered on the façade and extends through the roof high above the eave line. Two pair of art glass casement windows flank the chimney on the second floor with the limestone band running underneath. Two single art glass windows flank the chimney on the first floor.

The north (side) elevation includes two pairs of art glass casement windows on the second floor with the limestone band running underneath. On the first floor are a horizontal band of three double-hung windows and a single double-hung window. These four windows are clear glass and do not appear to be original. Three basement windows with iron bars and limestone sills sit just above the sidewalk. The one-story breezeway between the house and garage continues the first floor brick façade with a low-pitched clay tile roof. The entrance opening to the back yard has a wrought-iron gate. Two openings with limestone sills flank the entrance. The garage structure has a low-pitched clay tile roof with matching soffits and fascia. Three individual garage doors sit on the sidewalk facing north onto Erie Street. The original wood doors have been replaced, but have been painted as murals (trompe l'oeil) to match the original doors.² A six-foot brick wall with limestone cap continues from the garage to the alley at the rear of the lot.

The west (rear) façade is less visible from the street due to the one-story breezeway, garage and wall. Art glass casement windows in bands and pairs on the second floor sit above the running limestone banding. Two shed dormers clad in wood shingles face the rear yard. A second square brick chimney divides the north dormer. A one-story wing with hipped, clay tile roof sits at the southwest corner of the house and is set back from the south façade.

¹ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 9.

² Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 11.



History of the McCready House

The Edward McCready House is an excellent example of a Prairie style house designed by noted Prairie School architects Spencer and Powers in 1907. The Edward McCready House has retained excellent integrity, and its exterior stands virtually unchanged from its 1907 appearance.



Historical Context of the Edward and Caroline McCready House

Edward Washington McCready was born on May 6, 1860 in Crisfield, Maryland to G. S. and Loney McCready; he was one of four sons. In 1878 McCready moved to Chicago to work as a shipping clerk for his uncle R. W. McCready, owner of the R. W. McCready Cork Company. The company, which manufactured, supplied and shipped corks, was established in 1866 and incorporated in 1891 and was located at 344 W. Illinois Street in Chicago.³ Upon the death of his uncle, Edward took control of the company. McCready moved to Oak Park in 1893 and on August 5, 1905 married Caroline Pitkin.⁴

Caroline Pitkin was born in Oak Park in 1877 to Edward and Lillie Pitkin. The Pitkins were a prominent, active family in Oak Park. Mrs. Pitkin was the first elected woman official in Oak Park when she won a six year term on the High School Board in 1892. Caroline attended Mrs. Starett's School and graduated from Wellesley College in 1902.⁵

Edward and Caroline McCready had one daughter named Suzanne who was born on May 12, 1911. Caroline McCready was active in the Oak Park community. She helped to establish the Economy Shop, the Infant Welfare Society, and the Oak Park and River Forest League of Women Voters.⁶ Edward was a member of numerous clubs, including the South Shore Country Club, River Forest Tennis Club, Chicago Athletic Club, Westward Ho, and was an avid golfer.⁷

³ Albert Nelson Marquis. *A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men of The City of Chicago, 1911*, p. 439.

⁴ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ "Memorial Service for Life-long Resident, Mrs. E. W. McCready," September 26, 1957.

⁷ Albert Nelson Marquis. *A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men of The City of Chicago, 1911*, p. 439.

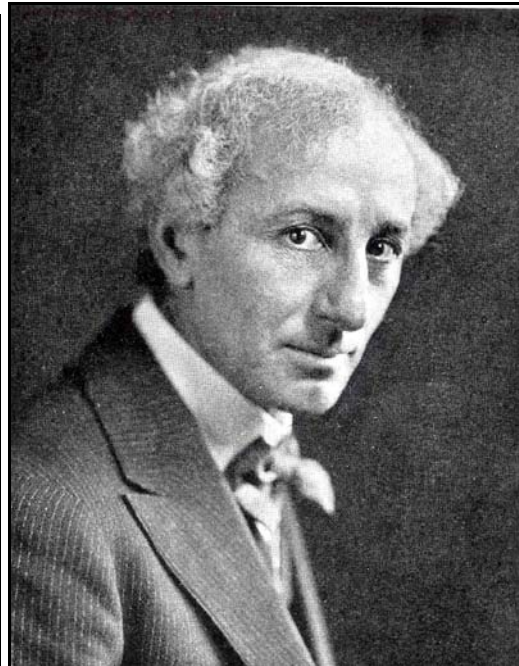
On September 13, 1919, Edward McCready and his daughter Suzanne, along with her nurse Miss Henrietta Steinbach, were killed when their car was hit by a train at a railway crossing in Westover, Maryland. The three were traveling to Atlantic City, New Jersey to rejoin Caroline McCready who had gone to visit her sister in Philadelphia. The funeral service was held in Philadelphia and Edward and Suzanne were cremated. Miss Steinbach was buried in L'Anse, Michigan. Caroline McCready never remarried. She died in September, 1957 having lived in the house she and Edward built for 50 years.⁸

Spencer and Powers and the Prairie School

Robert Closson Spencer, Jr. was born on April 13, 1864 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Robert graduated from Milwaukee High School and, in 1886, from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in mechanical engineering.⁹ He had a great fondness and proficiency for drawing and painting so he decided to pursue architecture as a profession. He spent a year in the architectural office of H. C. Koch of Milwaukee as a draftsman and then moved to Boston to study design in the architectural department of MIT. He spent three years as a designer for Wheelwright & Haven, and then with Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge. While at Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge he won the Rotch Traveling Scholarship Prize of \$2,000 in 1891, given by the Boston Society of Architects. He was the first “western” architect to win. He traveled abroad for two years in the study of architecture, mainly in France and Italy. Upon his return to Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge he was placed in their Chicago office and took direct charge of the interior design and decoration of the Chicago Public Library (now the Chicago Cultural Center).¹⁰



Robert Spencer (ca. 1890s)



Robert Spencer (ca. 1920s)

(Source: Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest)

⁸ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 8-9.

⁹ “R. C. Spencer, Architect, Dies in Tucson, Ariz. *Oak Leaves*, September 24, 1953.

¹⁰ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 1-2.

He remained with Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge until 1894, when he founded his own firm. Many of his early designs were never built; however, most of his design after 1902 were constructed. His only non-residential design in Oak Park was the Oak Park & River Forest High School, completed in 1908, of which commission he shared with architect Normand S. Patton.¹¹

In 1905, Robert Spencer formed a partnership with Horace S. Powers. Little is known about Powers, who was born in Chicago on February 7, 1872. He took a degree from the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) in 1899 and he studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. During this period Powers had apprenticeships in the offices of Nimmons and Fellows, Howard Van Doren Shaw, and the D. H. Burnham Company. Additionally, from 1899 to 1900, Powers was the Chief Draftsman for the U.S. Commission to the Paris Exposition of 1900. He practiced architecture on his own account in Chicago from 1903-1905 when he joined with Robert Spencer. His role in the firm was mainly that of manager and draftsman. He never married, loved yachting, and, as Robert Spencer put it, “*he was a faithful and congenial partner, who did much toward the satisfactory construction of the dreams of our office.*”¹²



167 N. Ridgeland, Stephens House, 1909



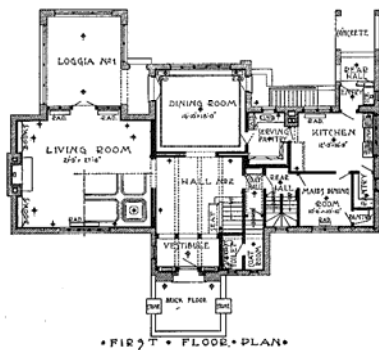
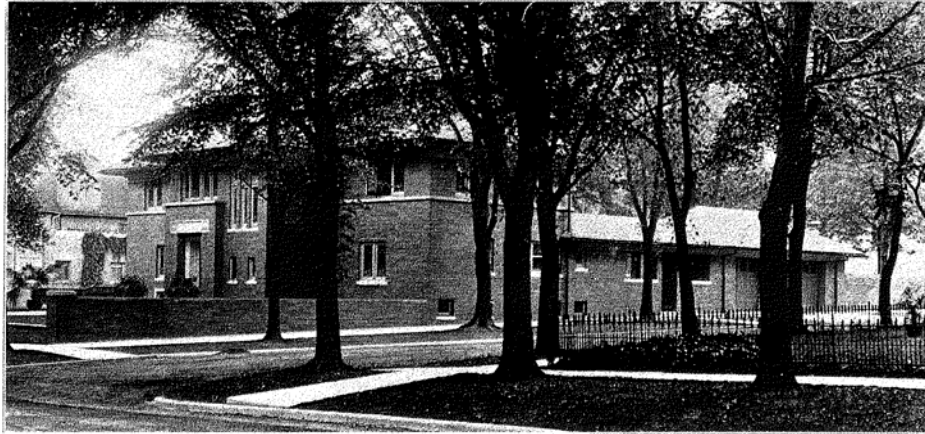
438 Augusta, Nathan Shure House, 1915

The firm of Spencer and Powers continued to flourish until 1923. After that and until 1928 Spencer again practiced alone. He moved to Oklahoma in 1928 to teach architecture at Oklahoma A & M College. In 1930 he joined the architecture faculty at the University of Florida, where he remained teaching until 1934. Then he returned to painting and became a noted muralist for the Federal Government and marine painter. He retired to Arizona in 1938 and died in Tucson on September 9, 1953 at the age of 89.¹³

¹¹ Molly Wickes, Editor. A Guide to the Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District, p. 78.

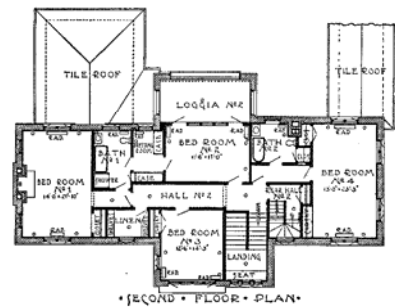
¹² Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin, p. 2-3.

¹³ “R. C. Spencer, Architect, Dies in Tucson, Ariz. Oak Leaves, September 24, 1953.



A Substantial Brick Mansion
Spencer & Powers, Architects, Chicago, Illinois

THE plan of this house has been carefully worked out and embodies all modern improvements. The house is built on a corner lot, the kitchen and the garage portion facing one street, and built up to the lot line. The entrance faces east and sets back a ways from the road to give a chance for the terracing. The living porch has been located on the garden side with south, west, and north exposure, and has been placed so that it is accessible from the living room and from the dining room. An interesting feature of the plan is the fact that the garage has been connected with the house. The interior has been treated in a simple and dignified manner. The living rooms and halls are trimmed in oak, and the bedrooms in birch stained, with oak floors in all of these rooms. The service portion has birch trim painted, with linoleum on the floors. The floors of the loggia, front entrance, and terrace are of brick laid in concrete. The house is situated in Oak Park, Illinois, and was completed for Mr. E. W. McCready in June, 1908. For exterior details see plate following.



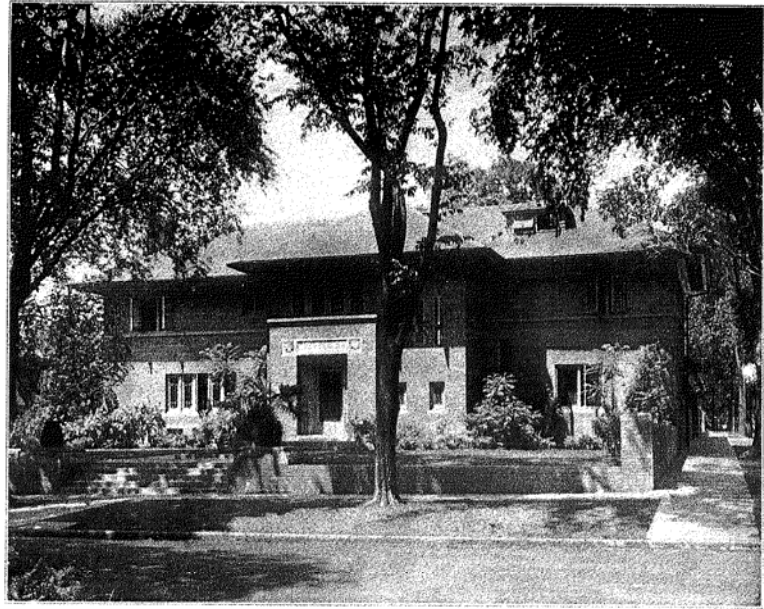
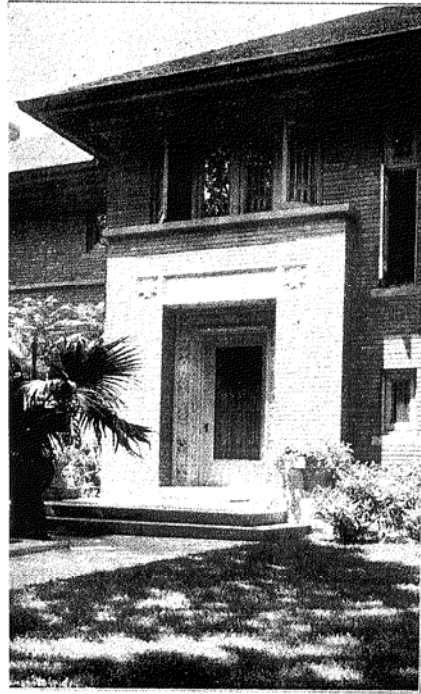
(Source: *Country and Suburban Homes of the Prairie School Period*, Hermann Valentin Von Holst, 1913)

Robert Spencer and Frank Lloyd Wright were contemporaries. His association with Prairie architecture began in 1897 when he moved into an office in Chicago's Steinway Hall, frequented by other architects such as Dwight Perkins, Frank Lloyd Wright, the Hunt Brothers and George Dean. Spencer was inspired more by Louis Sullivan than by Frank Lloyd Wright, and while Wright and Spencer were close friends, Spencer never became a follower; rather his career ran parallel.¹⁴ Spencer and Wright worked in offices next door to each other on the 15th floor of the Schiller Building in Chicago which helped to cement their friendship. They were close socially and were seen often in each other's company and may have influenced each other architecturally in their early careers. Wright kept one of Spencer's house renderings pinned on his wall in 1895, and Spencer's early designs appeared in the *Ladies Home Journal*, *County Life in America*, and *Brickbuilder* in 1900-1901.¹⁵ Spencer wrote frequently on the theory and practice of domestic architecture. His informal, illustrated articles for *House Beautiful* did much to promote Prairie School designs and ideas to a national audience, and he published the first major article about Wright's work in *Architectural Review* in 1900.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

¹⁶ Molly Wickes, Editor. *A Guide to the Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District*, p. 78.



A Substantial Brick Mansion

Spencer & Powers, Architects, Chicago, Illinois

BRICK is a favorite material for the more costly city and suburban homes, not only on account of the fire-resisting qualities of the material, but also on account of the variety of beautiful textures and color effects that can be obtained in a well-laid brick wall. In this exterior a medium tan-colored Norman brick has been used with the horizontal joints raked out and the vertical joints made flush, thus accentuating the horizontal lines of the design. The roof is of Cloverport, Kentucky, red shingle tile. The entrance faces east. Casement windows with a simple but rich leaded glass design have been used throughout, except in the kitchen portion, where the usual double hung window has been installed. For plans and exterior showing garage see plate preceding.

Source: *Country and Suburban Homes of the Prairie School Period*, Hermann Valentin Von Holst, 1913

PLATE 98

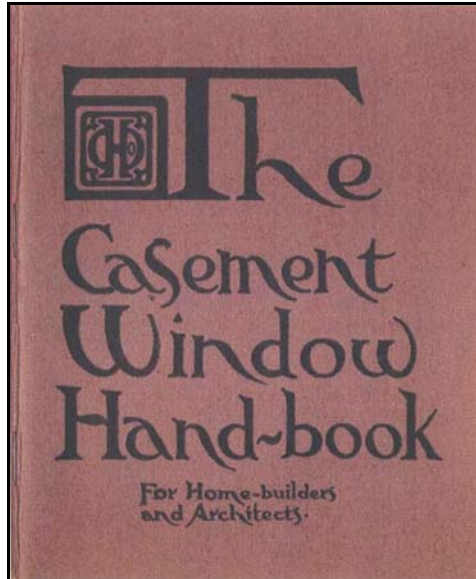
While Spencer is associated with the Prairie School, his designs have their roots in the English manor houses and cottages. He took inspiration from contemporary English architects who were translating medieval architecture for modern day needs which resulted in a conservative, formal version of the Prairie style with rectangular details and a suggestion of half timbering. H. Allen Brooks, author of *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, noted that “*several of his designs are clearly Tudor forms with Prairie horizontality and basic simplicity.*”¹⁷ This is evident in the house at 167 N. Ridgeland Avenue, designed by Spencer in 1909 with a distinctive half-timbering look. The massing and symmetrical design of the McCready House, as well as the house he designed at 438 Augusta which bears a striking resemblance, indicate the English Manor influence.¹⁸

Casement windows were extremely popular with Prairie school architects and were used almost exclusively in their designs. This popularity came from the influence of the English Arts & Crafts movement, which revived the casement window in England. Spencer realized that a shortage of necessary window hardware designed specifically for casements in the United States kept them from widespread use. Due to a different climate, American homes

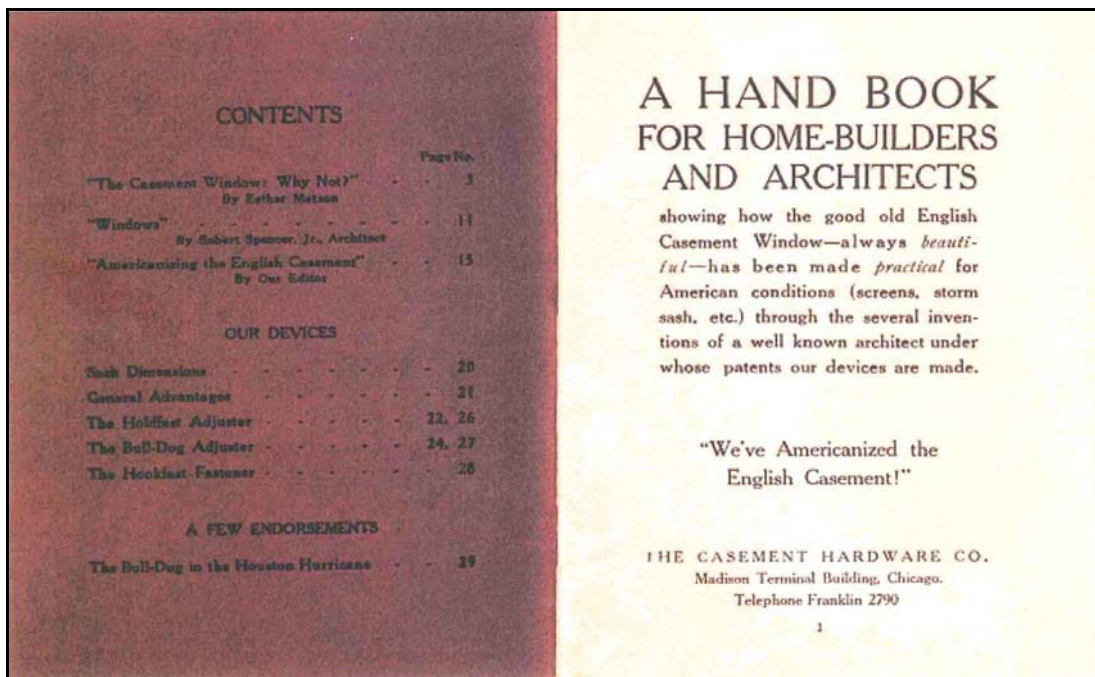
¹⁷ Kevin Coyle and Catherine McLoughlin. *The Edward McCready House research report for the 2001 Wright Plus House Walk*, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

needed separate kinds of frames, latches, cranks, adjusters and locks in order to make effective use of casements.¹⁹



Spencer experimented with possible solutions to this problem and filed his first patent application in 1903. His continued experimentation and following successes led to his forming the Casement Hardware Company in 1906, along with Horace Powers and William Ordway, his attorney. He remained as president for the next 20 years. The company flourished during its first decade as casement windows became a popular form among the general public. Spencer's son Charles became manager of the company in 1916 and held this position until the company ceased operation in the mid-1950s.²⁰



¹⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

Criteria for Designation

According to Section 7-9-6(B) of the Oak Park Historic Preservation Ordinance, the Historic Preservation Commission must make a preliminary determination of eligibility after receiving a nomination. A determination of preliminary eligibility must be based upon a finding that there is a likelihood that a nominated historic landmark will meet one or more of the "Criteria for Designation" set forth in Section [7-9-5](#) of this Article.

The Edward and Caroline McCready House was nominated under the following criteria:

- (1) Significance as an example of the architectural development or heritage of the Village of Oak Park;
- (5) Embodiment of those distinguishing characteristics of a significant architectural style;
- (6) Identification as the work of an architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the Village of Oak Park, the State of Illinois and the United States;

In addition, the property is at least 50 years old and has sufficient integrity of location, design, materials and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.

Bibliographical References

Primary and unpublished sources

Village of Oak Park building permit no. 1459, dated 6 September 1907 for 231 N. Euclid Avenue. Owner: E. W. McCready, Contractor: S. N. Nelson. Residence valued at \$17,000.

Letter from R. H. Bradley, Assistant Secretary, Northern Trust Company, dated November 20, 1957 regarding the sale of the property at 231 North Euclid Avenue.

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