



123 MADISON STREET, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS 60302

HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION REPORT



Cicero Fire House No. 2
129 Lake Street

Preliminary Determination of Eligibility approved by the
Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission on April 10, 2008

Designated by Village Ordinance on June 16, 2008

Cicero Fire House No. 2

129 Lake Street

Built: 1897
Architect: William Van Keuren

Cicero Fire House No.2 is located at the southeast corner of Lake Street and Lombard Avenue in Oak Park, almost surrounded by the adjacent *Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District*.¹

The north-facing building is located at 129 Lake Street. The two-story brick and sandstone Richardson Romanesque building was constructed in 1898, with two separate, though connected, one-story rear buildings. For the purpose of this nomination all three buildings are considered one structure, although the varying uses and unique history of each will be examined. The 1927 building immediately behind the Cicero fire station and connected to it, was built to house machinery related to the operation of the village streetlight system. The southernmost building, sharing a common façade with the middle building, may have been built as early as 1912 to house water pumping machinery or may be an expansion and remodeling that took place after 1927. The 1898 building is set upon a basement and clad with brown face brick accented with rough red sandstone on the north and west sides, with common brick on its east facade. All three sections together have a reverse “L” footprint and a flat roof. The rear one-story additions are yellow brick with limestone trim and aluminum windows, and include entrances facing west and south.



 **Landmark Nomination**
129 LAKE STREET
City of Oak Park, IL
Community Planning & Development

¹ Bluestone, Daniel. “Guide to Architecture in the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District.” p. 2-3.

The north (Lake Street) elevation is divided vertically by a wide sandstone beltcourse underneath the second floor windows. The first floor façade is clad in ashlar sandstone in repetitive horizontal patterns. Two large openings, originally garage doors, now house horizontal aluminum windows with vertical wood board siding above and below. Large vertical sandstone voissiors cap the openings. A single entrance door with an original transom is set at the east corner of the façade. The second floor is clad in brown brick with two large arched window openings centered on the façade and aligned above each first-floor opening. The arches are set within sandstone surrounds. The arched windows have been replaced with smaller horizontal aluminum windows with a solid metal panel above. Between the former front door openings there is an original brass plaque from Cicero Township in 1898, listing the Cicero officers and the architect's name. The original metal cornice and parapet were removed in the past and replaced with a flat red brick parapet. That original cornice included a central fan-shape arch topped by a flagpole with two medallions announcing "Cicero Fire Co. No. 2."

The west (Lombard Avenue) elevation is divided into a two-story section (1898) and a one-story section (1912/1927). The two-story façade is clad in brown brick with single vertical window openings evenly spaced along the first and second floors. Each window has a limestone lintel and brick header. A single entrance door is situated at the north corner of the façade. A large opening, formerly a garage door, is situated at the south end of the façade and has been filled with red brick. To the south is a small square glass block window. The original metal cornice and parapet were removed in the past and replaced with a flat red brick parapet.

The one-story west (Lombard Avenue) elevation is clad in yellow brick with limestone coping on the flat brick parapet and a simple limestone cornice. Brick rowlock courses frame a rectangular panel with signage that reads "Oak Park Pumping Station." Five tall vertical window openings are grouped in three and two along the façade with aluminum grille work. A single entry door is situated at the south end of the façade below a large flat metal canopy. A large service entry door is situated at the north end of the façade. Both doors include aluminum grille work matching the window openings.

The south elevation is a continuation of the west façade, clad in yellow brick with a flat brick parapet with limestone coping and a simple limestone cornice. Brick rowlock courses frame a rectangular panel with signage that reads "Oak Park Pumping Station." Seven tall vertical window openings are evenly spaced along the façade with aluminum grille work. A large service entry door and a smaller entry door are situated at the east end of the façade, with matching aluminum grille work.

The east elevation of the one-story portion of the building is simple yellow brick with single window openings and service entry doors. The two-story portion of the building is brown common brick with aluminum windows on the second floor, a single entry door on the first floor, and several openings filled with brick. A small, square brick chimney stands near the south end of the façade.

Directly to the east of the two-story section of the building sits a one-story seven-car brick garage with a flat roof, possibly built in the 1940s.

The design of the 1898 original building by architect William Van Keuren, with a large central first floor room and a large meeting hall on the second floor, allowed the structure to be successfully adapted to serve as a hub for changing governmental services (i.e. fire station, public works, and health department) and for social and recreational services (clubhouse, theater, music hall, and meeting hall). The fire house has seen constant habitation and modifications have been made to the interior, as well as to the roof. In its early years, the highly functional, large doors which opened out on to Lake Street allowed the fire department to quickly move its fire truck and equipment out of the building to the location of the fire call. The second floor of the building served a vast variety of social and recreational uses. The public hall located there provided a space for meetings and for theatrical and musical productions.

In 1991, there may have been minor repairs and tuck pointing to the brick façade of at least a portion of the building.² In 1996, more extensive repairs were made to the roof and façade as part of improvements to the water pumping operation located there. Because of its constant use and repairs over the years, the building is still functioning, retaining features as described above, and owned by the Village of Oak Park. The decorative stone bands and patterns of the facade's original design are intact and highly visible from Lake Street.³ Today, the structure's façade has darkened slightly due to exposure to the elements and needs cleaning. While it has lost some of its external features, like the original cornice with parapet and the original street facing windows and doors, the historical record, including the photographs taken by local historian, photographer, and bicyclist Philander Barclay (1878-1940), provide accurate documentation that would facilitate restoration and/or replication of missing or deteriorated features.⁴



² Memo from Oak Park Fire Prevention Bureau on recent inspection of the building, dated March 21, 1991

³ Memo from Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner, Village of Oak Park to Historic Preservation Commission, Village of Oak Park, dated August 9, 2007.

⁴ The Philander Barclay photographs are available at the Historical Society of Oak Park River Forest. Additionally, proposed plans for restoration can be found in the Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest's "Realizing a Vision: 'Village History Center & Museum' Restoring Oak Park's Oldest Public Building and Building a New Legacy." September 2007.





History of the Cicero Fire House No. 2

Cicero Fire House No. 2 was built in 1898 to serve the citizens of the Ridgeland section of Cicero Township, now commonly known as the east side of Oak Park, roughly situated between East Avenue, Chicago Avenue, Austin Boulevard and Madison Street. Once a part of the larger Cicero Township, the area always had ties to its western neighbor Oak Park, sharing a library and other amenities, even as it developed and cherished its own Ridgeland identity with social and quasi-municipal organizations.⁵



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

The brick-and-stone clad Richardsonian Romanesque structure at 129 Lake Street in Oak Park, has served citizens of this community since its construction in 1898 in a wide variety of ways. The oldest continuously operated government building in Oak Park, it predates the incorporation of the municipality and is a living link to the days of Cicero Township, when volunteer firefighters rode horse-drawn fire wagons to serve citizens in the semi-rural hamlet

⁵ Information on early Oak Park and Ridgeland is drawn from the 1937 *Historical Survey of Oak Park*, Gertrude Hoagland; the undated manuscript *Early Ridgeland*, thought to be written by George Butters, and the 1967 dissertation by Arthur LeGacy *Improvers and Preservers: A History of Oak Park, Illinois 1833-1940*.

that would one day become Oak Park, Illinois. Together with the later attached structures to its rear, a 1927 streetlight switching station and the c. 1912 village water pumping station, this one larger building taken as a unit represents the early and continuous municipal delivery of water, street lighting, recreation programs, and fire protection. These historic buildings demonstrate the evolution of key municipal services, including the delivery of health, recreation, and other public works services, which also were added here through the decades of continuous use of this site.

The building also represents the use of Richardsonian Romanesque on a public building in Oak Park. The style was often used in public buildings due to its use of brick and stone, resulting in buildings with a solid, commanding presence. The Romanesque style is fairly rare in Oak Park, while the building has undergone some alterations, its main Romanesque features clearly remain.

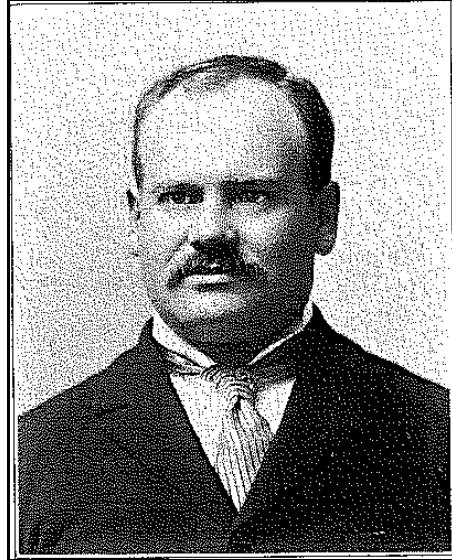
William J. Van Keuren, Architect

William J. Van Keuren (1853-1915), architect of Cicero Fire Station No. 2, left his mark on Oak Park as a prolific designer of homes and commercial buildings from the late 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century, working in a variety of popular styles including Queen Anne Victorian, Richardson Romanesque, and Stick-style Victorian. While he continuously maintained his architectural practice in a series of offices in Chicago's Loop, Van Keuren's work in his adopted hometown of Oak Park was substantial and a local newspaper account in 1896 credits him as perhaps the most prolific designer of homes of that era.⁶ While no complete catalog of his work exists, numerous sources indicate that Van Keuren may have played a key role in shaping the streetscape of Oak Park as the community was transforming itself from a small unincorporated village of only about 3,000 residents within Cicero Township to a booming independent municipality of nearly 30,000 at the time of his death in 1915.

It is not known how and why he was selected for the commission, but it is clear from contemporary accounts in the local newspaper that he was well-known and prolific in his hometown; also, in a highly contentious local political environment in the late 1890s, it is possible that a local architect was sought since Frederick Shock, an Austin resident, was selected to design a Cicero Fire Station in that community at roughly the same time.

A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Van Keuren moved to Oak Park about 1885. It is not known where he received his architectural training or education, but by 1888, the Oak Park city directory shows him living on today's South Boulevard near Oak Park Avenue and working as an architect in Chicago's Loop. Two brothers are listed as living at his address in the 1888 Oak Park Directory: Edward and Charles W. The former is listed as a contractor and builder and the latter as a builder. By 1894, C.W. Van Keuren is listed as a draftsman, working with W.J. Van Keuren. By about 1897, Van Keuren designed his own home at 100 Clinton, which he lived in until his death.

⁶ "W.J. Van Keuren, Architect," *Oak Park Reporter*, 3 January 1896, 3.



William Van Keuren, c. 1891

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

Dozens of W.J. Van Keuren's commissions can be documented through mentions in Oak Park and Chicago newspapers, trade publications like Construction News and American Contractor,⁷ and previous research on his career, but it is useful to focus on several examples that show his range.

In 1891, Van Keuren designed the Niles Block at the southwest corner of South Boulevard and Wisconsin (now Marion). This substantial three-story commercial building was built of "St. Louis pressed brick and brownstone with projecting metal bays, restrained Romanesque motifs, stone lintels and carved stone ornament."⁸ These same sort of architectural elements were recurring features in his work, including in Cicero Fire Station No. 2. Van Keuren designed an addition to the Niles Block in 1894, and a restoration in 1993 rescued the long-vacant building from demolition.



Niles Block, 1894, 101 S. Marion Street

⁷ The on-line index to *American Contractor* (1898-1912) at Chicago Historical Society lists about 90 works designed by W.J. Van Keuren in the city of Chicago in this period, with the Steiner Index, developed by art historian Frances Steiner at The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest and Oak Park Public Library lists more than 200 works by Van Keuren in Oak Park, River Forest, and Forest Park. The latter has multiple entries on certain structures, so that number is inflated.

⁸ Daniel Bluestone, *Ridgeland Revealed*, 18.

Also in 1891, Van Keuren designed the H.B. Noyes House at 329 Wisconsin. Described in Ridgeland Revealed as “an essay in the Queen Anne style with highly decorative wood brackets, ornamental balusters and spindle work on the porches, gables, eaves and turret,” this two-story frame residence is perhaps one of the most intact examples of his single-family designs. Other single family residential work that remains extant in Oak Park is the Charles R. Erwin House I, 518 N. East (c. 1892), the William H. Cribben House, 330 S. Euclid, and the W.H. Yorke House, 420 N. Kenilworth (c. 1886), a remodeling.

Van Keuren also designed two notable row houses in Oak Park in the 1890s. The Emerson Ingalls Row Houses, 200-206 Forest (1892) blends the Queen Anne and Richardsonian Romanesque styles, with its asymmetry and the contrasting use of the smooth-textured bricks and rough hewn trim stone. It is adjacent to the 1901 Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Frank W. Thomas House, offering an excellent opportunity to contrast the evolution of architecture in Oak Park.⁹ Also extant is the 1891 Rothermal Row Houses, 100-110 Home Avenue.



H.B. Noyes House, 329 Wisconsin



Charles Erwin House 1, 518 N. East



William Cribben House, 330 S. Euclid



W.H. Yorke House, 420 N. Kenilworth

⁹ *A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District*, 26 and Alice Sinkevitch, *AIA Guide to Chicago*, 348.

The Niles Block was not the first commercial building designed by Van Keuren in what is today's Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District. In 1888, he designed the Goelitz Block, the two-story brick commercial building at the northwest corner of Oak Park Avenue and North Boulevard. This structure has been described as the first business block in this neighborhood, which prior to that point had been dotted with single-family homes. Located across the street from Oak Park's first waterworks, this two-story brick structure was notable for its square corner turret, elaborate vertical brick pilasters, and metal decorative cornice.

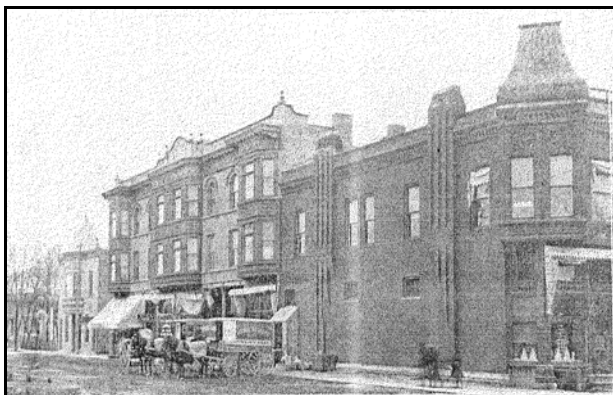
That building was the first of what would become five brick buildings designed by Van Keuren that wrap west and north around that corner. While all have been altered to varying degrees, they remain extant today and give us a unique insight into Van Keuren's impact on Oak Park architecture. Historic photos reveal that these brick buildings featured projecting metal bays, elaborate metal cornices and corner turrets, and stone trim details. These exuberant, elaborate Queen Anne Victorian buildings were leading the way in Oak Park's transition from a rural hamlet with mainly one-and-two-story wooden commercial buildings to a more sophisticated suburban community.



Goelitz Block, (photo 1893), 101-107 N. Oak Park



Knapp Livery and Goelitz Flats (photo 1902)



Goelitz Flats (photo c. 1898)



Ingalls Row Houses (photo c. 1899), 200-208 Forest

(Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest)

These buildings, though shorn of ornamentation today, give insight into Van Keuren's Queen Anne designs, especially when compared to historic photos. West from the Goelitz Block is

the 1893-98 Goelitz Flats, 806-812 North Boulevard, a three-story building with retail below and apartments above. Further west at 814 North Boulevard is the two-story 1894 A.A. Knapp Livery, shorn of its central turret, but possessing original cornice. On the other side of the Goelitz Block, stretching north on Oak Park Avenue, is the two-story Goelitz Building at 107 N. Oak Park Avenue, built in 1891 after the success of the first building; it is now stripped of its original bays and cornice. Adjacent to the north at 109-111 N. Oak Park Avenue is the 1890 George Whaples Building, designed and built as a two-story commercial building with two, one-story front bays capped by turrets. Within about 10 years, a third floor was added and the bays were extended to the third story, but without turrets. In 1911, Van Keuren again designed a commercial building for the Goelitz family in this neighborhood, at 100-106 S. Oak Park Avenue.

Richardsonian Romanesque

The Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture was employed mainly in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Used initially in public and commercial buildings, Henry Hobson Richardson of Boston brought awareness of the style to homeowners with his designs, including the Glessner House in Chicago, a National Historic Landmark. Romanesque buildings are always built of masonry material with some rough-faced texture. Wide, rounded (Romanesque) arches are a key identifying feature of the style. These may occur above windows or porch supports or over entryways.¹⁰ The solidity of this style made it ideal to convey a sense of permanence and it was frequently used in public buildings like churches, school, courthouses, libraries, and municipal buildings.

The Cicero Fire Station No. 2 features large arched windows and window openings and rough-cut sandstone that reflect Romanesque detailing. Most exterior materials on the building are original, including the brick and stone façade. The changes that have occurred include the infill of the garage doors and replacement of the windows. The building contains detailed stone ornamentation on the window surrounds. Also present are ornamental brick patterns on the one-story façade. Although changes to the building have altered the appearance, the integrity of the remaining building materials conveys the aesthetics and feeling of the period of significance.

Italianate

The Italianate style began in England as part of the Picturesque movement, a reaction to classical ideals in architecture that had been fashionable for many years. The style was most prevalent in the United States between 1850 and 1880. Examples vary from exuberant detail to more modest displays.¹¹ The Cicero Fire House No. 2 displayed some Italianate features – mainly the elaborate, bracketed cornice and parapet, which has been removed but is evident in historic photographs.

¹⁰ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 301.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

Use and Adaptive Use of a Building—1898-1958

As the only public building in Oak Park in continuous operation providing government services since before the Village of Oak Park was incorporated, this structure holds a unique place in the community's history. Its uses have been many, at times overlapping. As a fire station, a seat of local government, a storage depot for public works equipment, a meeting hall, a public works office and shop, and a health department headquarters, this structure is useful for interpreting many aspects of local history.

Cicero Township had been incorporated in 1857 as a 36-square-mile territory that encompassed today's communities of Oak Park, Berwyn, Cicero, and much of Chicago's west side, including the Austin and Garfield Park neighborhoods. Various parts of the township developed in radically different ways, with the eastern section gradually annexed to Chicago through the decades. By the early 1870s, Oak Park was a name on a train station and a post office, with a growing business and residential section and several churches and community institutions. Ridgeland was a distinct, but overlapping, community to Oak Park's east, and both communities chafed at being ruled by a larger government whose taxes were thought to be too high for the municipal services delivered. The communities sought independence also because of disagreements with development in other sections of the township, including the operation of saloons, a racetrack, and large manufacturing businesses. Criticisms that municipal services were unevenly distributed within Cicero also led to residents taking matters into their own hands and organizing self-help groups.

In 1886, the all-volunteer Ridgeland Fire Association was first organized to serve the area. Residents of the Ridgeland area were very concerned with the threat of possible fires, especially grass fires in the area's open prairie. As a result, they were one of the first neighborhoods in the western suburbs of Chicago to install fire alarm boxes and connect them to their fire house.¹² A now demolished frame building on Lake Street just east of Ridgeland Avenue was the first Ridgeland Fire Association fire station, which served the community a decade before this structure was built. This fire association was an important community-building organization, along with a Ridgeland literary society and a Ridgeland hall association. Other fire stations in Cicero included the now demolished Cicero Fire Station No. 3 on Marion Street in today's Downtown Oak Park. The old Municipal Building, constructed in 1903 at the southeast corner of Lake and Euclid, included a police/fire station. The building was demolished and a new main fire station was constructed on Euclid Avenue in 1982. In 1899, just prior to Austin's annexation to the City of Chicago, a brick fire-police station was built in that community using plans from notable Austin architect Frederick Shock. That building, known as Cicero Fire Station No. 1, still stands and is used for its original purpose. The station numbers refer to the order in which the earlier frame buildings were constructed.

¹² Hoagland, Getrude Fox. *Historical Survey of Oak Park, Illinois*. p. 64.



(Source: Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest, 1902)

Architect William Van Keuren, a 30-year resident of Oak Park, designed the two-story Cicero Fire Station No. 2 structure for his client, Cicero Township, in cooperation with the all-volunteer Ridgeland Fire Association. In 1896, Cicero Township had purchased a vacant lot at Lombard and Lake for \$2,500. The fire house and a rear shed for storage of street department equipment was built at a cost of \$7,381, with Van Keuren earning a fee of \$250.¹³ By comparison, Austin's new fire and police station was built for nearly \$15,000, and a mortgage was taken out on the property.

The construction of such a fine facility was a point of local pride in Ridgeland and a sense that the "rural hamlet" was growing up and receiving the better services its citizens demanded. *"The reception and festivities were held in the handsome new engine house, for which the enterprising men of Ridgeland, the pioneers of fire organization and apparatus in Cicero, have worked for ten years and of which they are justly proud,"* reported the local press. *"It has a graceful front and exterior, and within is very tastefully designed and completed. ...Mr. W.J. Van Keuren, the architect, was complimented on all sides for the excellence of his designs and the good taste shown in the form and finish of the building in*

¹³ 1900 Cicero Township report. page 6.

all its features. This is said to be as handsome a fire building as there is in Cook County."¹⁴ Cicero Township's president handed Ridgeland Fire Association Chief J.W. Carter the keys to the firehouse and challenged him to be a good steward.

Yet even as the public enjoyed the new facility, Cicero Township was quickly headed for its final breakup. Even at that celebratory dedication service just mentioned, there were major signs of tension between Oak Park, Austin, and the central government. "*[Cicero Township] President [H.A.] Emerson [of Austin] then spoke for an hour, and generally squared things up with Oak Park. He trimmed down his opponents, defended his administration and praised his friends. He scouted the Oak Park article of politics as that of `has-been and would-be politicians' and declared that his own style of managers will be 'on-top' in the end.*"¹⁵ In about six months, Austin would be annexed to Chicago and Berwyn and Oak Park would be making the last dash to independence, crossing the finish line in 1902.

But at the annexation of Austin to Chicago, an account was made of the value of all the public property that remained in Cicero Township, especially since the Cicero Town Hall and many improvements were now in Chicago and restitution was being negotiated. The value of Austin government land/property was \$230,000, while only \$51,000 in government land and property remained in Cicero Township. Nearly \$10,000 of that latter value was Cicero Fire Station No. 2, second only to the value of the Berwyn Water Works as a single-ticket item. The first meetings of the newly reconstituted Cicero Township government, absent Austin, took place in the second floor meeting room of Cicero Fire Station No. 2 in December 1899.

Two years after the founding of the Village of Oak Park in 1902, the Ridgeland volunteer fire company was dissolved. The Oak Park Fire Department then used the Cicero Fire House No.2 structure as the village's north fire station until 1916, when a new station was built on Augusta Street between Harvey and Lombard.¹⁶ The Augusta station is still in use, though it has also been altered from its original appearance. A south station at Harrison and East, built in 1913, was replaced with a new building in 1961 when the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) was constructed through Oak Park.

¹⁴ Dedicated: Ridgeland Fire Engine House Formally Opened," *Oak Park Times*, 12-8-1898.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "New Fire Station: Village Board Authorizes Building of Department House on Augusta Street Between Harvey and Lombard." *Oak Leaves*. 7/22/1916. p. 1.



North Fire Station, 212 Augusta, c. 1940



North Fire Station c. 1983

(Village of Oak Park Fire Department)

In the late 1880s, James W. Scoville formed a waterworks company and began to pump well water around the Oak Park-Ridgeland area. After village incorporation in 1902, public interest in acquiring Lake Michigan water service from Chicago grew with the population and the dwindling well water. In 1912, a deal was struck and lake water began to flow to a new pumping facility to the rear of the former Cicero Fire Station. It is not clear if a new building was constructed or if the earlier rear shed-like structure was remodeled for this purpose.¹⁷ In 1925, a 5-million-gallon water reservoir was built under what is now Stevenson Playground, adjacent to the east end of the property. After the fire station moved in 1916, the village water department would move into the first floor of the 1898 building, which it would occupy for nearly the next 90 years.

From the time of the building's first construction and opening in December 1898, its "fine hall" on the second floor was used for public meetings.¹⁸ This social hall served as an anchor in this neighborhood on Oak Park's east side. The community used the structure for various social and recreational activities. For example, a local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veterans group, used the second floor as its meeting hall. Later other veterans' groups met there. Some of the other local groups that used the assembly room included the U.S.W.V. Camp 80 and Auxiliary and the U.S. Letter Carriers' Association.¹⁹

In the 1920s, the second floor public hall continued to serve as a public gathering spot. Affectionately referred to as "The Little Red House" in the local press in the 1922, it was transformed into a recreation center, pre-dating the construction of the four original John Van Bergen-designed village playground shelter buildings by a few years. It was apparently the first indoor space of the new Oak Park Playground Commission, a unit of the Village of Oak Park dedicated to acquiring, improving and programming small playgrounds in the village. This government unit was funded, in part, with the cash settlement from the city of Chicago for annexing Austin and "taking" Cicero Township public improvements. This effort

¹⁷ "Water Department: Historical Sketch," *Oak Leaves*, February 27, 1926, 54.

¹⁸ "Formal Opening of Engine House." *The Oak Park Times*. 12/1/1898. p. 1.

¹⁹ "Little Red House: Playground Board Reports on Use of Village Building – Drama in Children's Theater This Afternoon." *Oak Leaves*. 4/1/1922.

was separate from the Park District of Oak Park and not until 2003 would these two completely separate “parks and recreation” efforts be entirely combined.²⁰

“G.A.R. Hall, adjoining Pyott [Stevenson] will be converted into a community center once a week, beginning late in this month. It is planned to make Friday evening boys’ night...the aim is to provide recreational opportunities for the older boys and girls in the neighborhood.”²¹ Community dances, lectures, dramatic performances, and all sorts of play activities were developed for GAR Hall. Within a few years, the Children’s Playground Theater was described as “the only one of its kind in the state, and has attracted the notice of educators throughout the country.”²² These programs in “Playground Hall” as the second floor was dubbed, would last until all of the sectors of the village received new recreation centers in the next few years.

In July 1927, the Village of Oak Park constructed a new building behind the 1898 fire station, connecting it and the water pumping station further south, creating the existing building configuration. The new building would house the central substation for the village’s new street light system that was lauded as a fantastic municipal improvement.²³ The noteworthiness of the electrical system was in its technical details and controls that allowed central operation of what was called a system to make Oak Park the “best lighted community in the world.”²⁴ These electrical controls for the Village of Oak Park’s street lighting system were housed in the new building constructed at the rear of the Cicero Fire House No.2. The electrical sub-station cost \$18,000²⁵ and was designed by Charles T. Mordock of Randolph and Perkins, consulting engineers. “The substation....is as up-to-date in its construction and equipment as the system itself. Switches are placed to control each unit, the current being flashed on or off by a system of time clocks. Lights in the business district, as an example, are turned on earlier in the afternoon and turned off earlier in the night...This substation added to the village pumping station will save the taxpayers an estimated \$4,000 in combining the current used for pumping water into the village mains.”²⁶ Until the mid-1970s, this substation coordinated the lighting of 108 miles of village streets. The building was then used for storage and other public works uses.

A community health board had existed within the community from approximately 1905 through 1930s, but it did not have a full time director.²⁷ The Village’s Health Department was established in 1948, to assuage residents’ concerns regarding health issues in the community and rented space at Ridgeland and Lake. In 1952, the Village’s Health Department took up residence in the second floor of the building at 129 Lake Street²⁸ after a \$20,000 remodeling of the second floor.

²⁰ “Small Parks Plan,” *Oak Leaves*, March 11, 1916, 1; see also Hoagland, *Historical Survey of Oak Park*.

²¹ “The Playground Periscope,” *Oak Leaves*, Oct. 7, 1922, 54.

²² *Annual Report of Playground Board, 1927*.

²³ “Breaking Ground for Great Street Lighting System.” *Oak Leaves*. 7/23/27. p. 82.

²⁴ “Village Illuminated,” *Oak Leaves*, Dec. 17, 1927, 3; “The New Lights,” *Oak Leaves*, Dec. 24, 1927, 70.

²⁵ The Village of Oak Park. *Oak Park Street Lighting System*. p. 11.

²⁶ “Village Illuminated,” 6.

²⁷ Illinois Department of Public Health. *Study...*, p. a.

²⁸ “Health Department Move Approved By Trustees.” *Oak Leaves*. 12/20/1951, p. 9.

But that move did not come without community controversy. The veterans' groups who were still using GAR Hall were outraged at the short notice of the change and the appearance they were being pushed aside for mere office space.

"The officials who engineered this operation have nothing to be proud of in thus taking away the only suitable community space for veterans," said the United Spanish War Veterans in a memo to their members. Past post commander Charles Dodds said it was *"grossly unfair to us after we worked so hard to get the place in shape...[it is] a ramshackle building we were told we could use if we fixed it."*²⁹

In August 1957, a fire damaged the second floor of the 1898 structure, partially destroying the new health department offices in the south half of the building. Laboratories and workrooms were most damaged. The approximately \$25,000 in damage was limited to the rear second floor section and did not spread to the street light or pumping station or the front of the 1898 building.

The damage was repaired and the health department offices were returned to the space. As of 1993, the Oak Park Health Department was one of only four fully accredited health departments in the Chicago suburbs.³⁰ The department provided numerous services, including: vital records, general health, disease control, and environmental services out of the space.³¹ The department gradually outgrew their administrative space in the historic Cicero Fire House No.2 structure and the second floor became public works administrative space.

In 1996, the pumping station to the rear was repaired and upgraded. The entire project had a budget of \$1.3 million. The work included installing new pumps for the pumping station, restoration of the brick exterior of the pumping station addition, installation of new roof, and installation of new doors and windows.³²



²⁹ "Spanish War Vets Rap 'Eviction' by Village," *Oak Leaves*, Jan. 24, 1952, 13.

³⁰ Acker, Jennie. "Elimination of Health Department Would Be Grave Mistake: Hagerty." *Wednesday Journal*. 3/17/1993.

³¹ Cooper, Charlotte. "Health Department Looks to Avoid Budget Cuts." *Oak Leaves*. 2/24/1993.

³² Application for Building Permit and Certificate of Zoning Compliance, Village of Oak Park. Issued 10/11/1996.

During the past few decades, the Village of Oak Park has shown a deeper appreciation for its history and architecture, including the Cicero Fire House No. 2. In 2006, the Village of Oak Park completed its Lake Street Corridor Architectural Historic Survey where it identified 129 Lake Street as a significant property within the community. At its September 4, 2007 meeting, the Village of Oak Park board of trustees voted unanimously to designate the building as an Oak Park Landmark and to seek listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The front two-thirds of the building have been vacant since late 2007, when the new Village of Oak Park Public Works facility opened at Lombard Street and South Boulevard, immediately south of the adjacent train viaduct. The southernmost section of the building remains in use as the main Village of Oak Park water pumping station. The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest has submitted a proposal to the Village of Oak Park to use the building as a museum, research center, and archives to serve the community.³³

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 Cicero Fire House No. 2 was nominated under the following criteria:

- (1) Significance as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social development or heritage of the Village of Oak Park, the State, or the United States;
- (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.

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Village of Oak Park building permit no. 29055, dated 19 February 1959 for 129 Lake Street.
Owner: Village of Oak Park, Contractor: Matthews-Dunx Construction Co., Architect:
Francis A. Baldwin. Repair Fire Loss to Health Department Offices at \$29,975.

³³ The Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest. "Realizing a Vision: 'Village History Center & Museum' Restoring Oak Park's Oldest Public Building and Building a New Legacy." September 2007.

Village of Oak Park building permit no. 29138, dated 28 April 1959 for 129 Lake Street.
Owner: Village of Oak Park, Contractor: RSC Construction Co., Architect: Francis A. Baldwin. Construct new concrete stair to front of basement at \$1,500.

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OAK PARK HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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