



123 MADISON STREET, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS 60302

## HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION REPORT



**Rankin-Hemingway House  
639 North Oak Park Avenue**

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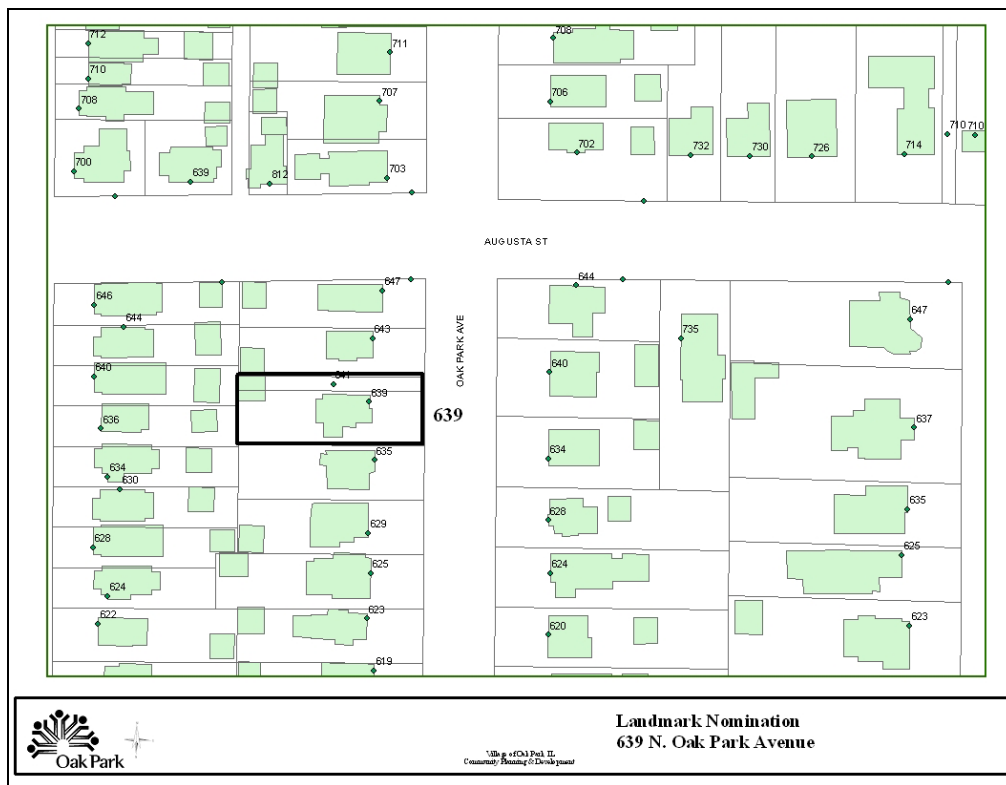
**Preliminary Determination of Eligibility approved by the  
Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission on October 13, 2011**

**Designated by Village Ordinance on November 28, 2011**

# Rankin-Hemingway House 639 N. Oak Park Avenue

**Built:** 1896-1916  
**Architect:** Eben E. Roberts

The 1896 Rankin-Hemingway House is located at 639 N. Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois, and faces east. The two and one-half story wood frame house sits on the west side of the street just to the south of Augusta Street. The house is an example of the Queen Anne style of architecture. The first floor rests on a raised foundation of limestone ashlar construction. The house is clad in wood clapboard siding. Typical of the Queen Anne style, each wall surface is broken up with many elements in an asymmetrical fashion. A two-story addition was constructed by Harper & Butendorff on the south elevation in 1916. The house was designed by architect E. E. Roberts and was one of three houses Robert's designed at Oak Park and Augusta streets based on the October 2, 1896 notice in the Oak Park Reporter that noted "*E. E. Roberts & Company have started one of the three houses they will build at Oak Park Avenue and Augusta Street.*"<sup>1</sup>



The east (front) façade is comprised of a two and one-half story bay encompassing the south half of the façade capped by a triangular pedimented gable. A square window is centered in the gable end which extends prominently over the bay. The three-sided bay is symmetrical in design with three large double-hung windows on each floor. The north half of the façade

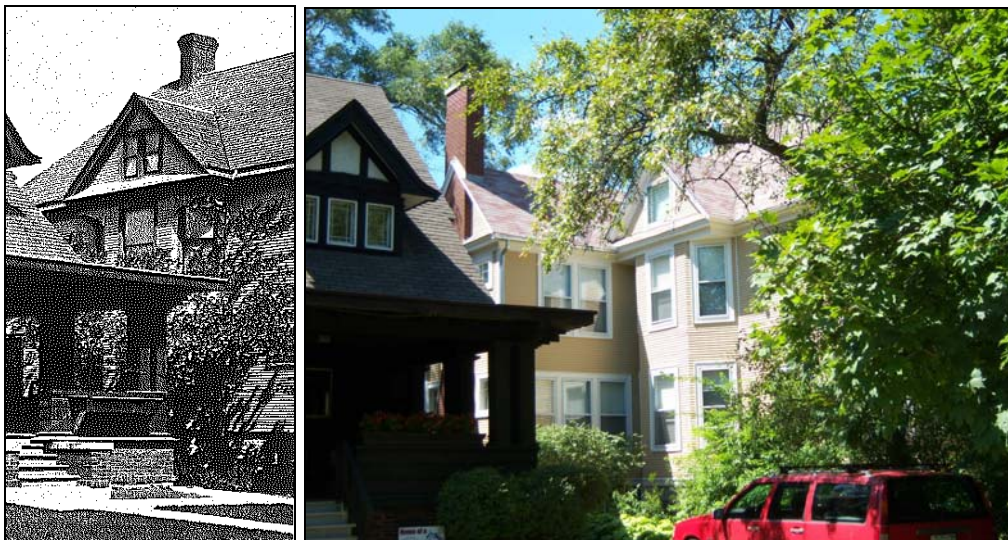
<sup>1</sup> Oak Park Reporter, October 2, 1896.

is a flush wall plane with a partial width open porch and central wood stair. The original porch posts were replaced in the mid-Twentieth century with decorative wrought-iron railings and supports, though no permit records are on file. The original stone supports remain beneath the porch. The single entry door is slightly off-set to the south with a transom window above, all of which is encased in wood trim. A single double-hung window is centered on the second floor. Capping the house is a tall, steeply sloped hip roof clad in asphalt shingles. A high rough stone foundation wraps the base of the house beneath wide horizontal banding. The remainder of the façade is clad with the original narrow wood clapboard, which was recently painted in a historic color scheme. The siding was covered for many years with asphalt shingles that were removed by the current owners in 2011.



View of house before (L) and after (R) the removal of the asphalt siding

A two and one-half story bay similar in design to the front façade, though slightly smaller, is centered on the south façade. The symmetrical design with three double-hung windows on each floor is also capped by a prominent gable extending out and set on the same wide horizontal molding that wraps the house at the eave line. A small fixed diamond pane glass window with red and blue panes of glass is set in the first floor façade east of the bay.



View of the house in 1912 and 2011 (Source: Glimpses of Oak Park, 1912)

The 1916 two-story addition extends south into the side yard directly west of the bay. The simple massing and design details of the house were incorporated into the design of the addition with some modifications. Window placement on the east façade remains symmetrical; however, banding of three double-hung windows on the first floor and paired double-hung windows on the second floor constitute the major change in fenestration. The wood molding at the eave line is simpler in design and scale. The wing is capped by a triangular pedimented gable end and central square window, with a tall and wide red brick chimney cutting through the roof line and eaves and extending to ground level. The addition also is set on a foundation with basement windows.

The north façade is a two-story flat plane with windows of varying shapes and sizes irregularly placed on each floor. A small gabled dormer with broken pediment and central square window is centered on the roof plane. A second red brick chimney is centered on the roof ridge near the back of the house. The north façade is clad with narrow wood clapboard siding above wide wood baseboard separating it from the stone foundation.

A narrow concrete driveway extends from the street along the north edge of the property to a two-car wood frame garage with hip roof constructed for George Hemingway by W. C. Frank in 1911.



## History of the Rankin/Hemingway House

The Rankin/Hemingway House is an example of a late Victorian house designed in the Queen Anne style of architecture. It was constructed in 1896 with an addition in 1916. The house was designed by architect E. E. Roberts, well known in Oak Park and throughout the Chicago area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The house is significant as the home of prominent local realtor George Hemingway, for its design in the Queen Anne style and its association with Roberts.

### George Rankin

The property at 639 N. Oak Park Avenue was part of a subdivision at the southeast corner of Augusta and Oak Park that was subdivided by Anson Hemingway in 1880. Anson divided the property into smaller lots and sold them to various people, including George Butters and his wife in 1889. Butters sold the lot to John Rankin in 1889, who held the property until its development in 1896 and sold it to his son George Rankin.<sup>2</sup> John Rankin immigrated to America in 1849 from Scotland, locating in Chicago. In 1875 he formed John Rankin & Company, a commission house dealing in grain.<sup>3</sup> In 1880 he moved his family to Oak park from Elgin. After 1891 they lived in the prominent Queen Anne style home at 245 N. Kenilworth Avenue. His family included his wife, son George, and six daughters – Jessie, Anne, Bethea, Isabella, Margaret (Mrs. Simpson Dunlop), and Mrs. A. W. Hutchins of Austin.<sup>4</sup>



Chicago Tribune, October 12, 1901

<sup>2</sup> Title search completed at the Cook County Recorder of Deeds, 118 N. Clark Street, Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of Cook County, Illinois*, Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1884, p. 792.

<sup>4</sup> Oak Park Directories and Blue Books.

George Rankin married Charlotte Belknap of Oak Park in 1893 and they had a son John, born in 1896. Also that year George purchased the newly constructed home for their growing family at 639 N. Oak Park from his father. The house, which was designed by architect E. E. Roberts, was to be their home for only three years, as Charlotte Rankin died unexpectedly in 1898. In 1899 George sold the house to Isaac and Margaret Ratcliff and moved in with his sister Margaret Dunlop at 417 N. Kenilworth Avenue. On October 11, 1901, still grieving for the his wife's untimely death, George Rankin committed suicide on the front porch of his sister's home by shooting himself in the heart. He was 43 years old.<sup>5</sup>

The Ratcliffs rented the house to A. J. Elliott after purchasing the house in 1899. Elliott was one of the owners of Rosenthal & Elliott, a firm that dealt in furs.<sup>6</sup>

## George and Anna Hemingway

In 1900 George and Anna (Ratcliff) Hemingway began renting the house at 639 N. Oak Park. Anna was the daughter of Isaac and Margaret Ratcliff, who moved to Oak Park from Ohio to be near their recently married daughter. Their son Wood Ratcliff was also living in Oak Park.<sup>7</sup> In 1908 George and Anna Hemingway officially purchased the house, where they remained until 1939. George R. Hemingway was born in Oak Park in 1876 to Anson and Adelaide Hemingway. He was the third child with three brothers (Willoughby, Alfred, Clarence) and two sisters (Anginette, Grace). He graduated from Oak Park & River Forest High School in 1893 and attended Oberlin College in Ohio. In 1895 Hemingway opened his own real estate office at 101 N. Marion Street, "*for the transaction of the general real estate, insurance and loan business.*"<sup>8</sup> He constructed the "Real Estate Building" at 121 N. Marion Street in 1909, where his offices occupied the second floor.



Hemingway Real Estate Building, 121 N. Marion Street

<sup>5</sup> "Broker Grieves for Wife and Ends Life," Chicago Daily Tribune, October 12, 1901, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Oak Park Directory 1899.

<sup>7</sup> Lee Brooke, Yesterday When I Was Younger..., Oak Park: First Chicago Bank of Oak Park, 1989, p. 235.

<sup>8</sup> "Realtor for 32 Years," Oak Leaves, October 22, 1927, p. 77.

Hemingway loaned millions of dollars for home building over the years but reportedly never foreclosed a mortgage or was involved in any property-related lawsuits. *“It is my opinion that anyone who buys Oak Park land at the present market price (1927) will find his property to be in a rising market.”*<sup>9</sup> Hemingway subdivided and sold acres of land in Oak Park during the steady growth of the Village in the early twentieth century. He was quoted in the Chicago Tribune in 1933 on the significant demand in housing and rise in land value in Oak Park,

*“Land from Ridgeland to East Avenue and from Augusta to Division was a cow pasture only fifteen years ago. In 1917 I sold lots on both sides of Euclid, from Thomas to Division, for \$8 a front foot and resold them in 1926 for \$100 a front foot. Land at Augusta and Fair Oaks Avenue that sold for \$800 an acre in 1913 was sold at the rate of \$24,000 an acre in 1926. Lots on Madison Street, from Oak Park Avenue to Austin Boulevard, that brought \$25 a front foot in the boom of 1890, sold for \$300 a front foot in 1925.”*<sup>10</sup>

By 1927 Hemingway employed 11 salesmen. He incorporated his office in 1924 and all the stock in the business was owned by him and his co-workers, then known as the George R. Hemingway Organization.<sup>11</sup> In 1933 the office moved to the Parkside Building at 1026 North Boulevard, where it remained until being renamed Houser Real Estate.



George R. Hemingway, 1913



Hemingway, ca. 1925

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

George married Anna Ratcliff in 1898 and the couple had three children: George, Jr., who

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> “Oak Park Land Values Soar Eighty Million Per Cent,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 15, 1933, p. A12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

died at a young age, Margaret (who later married Homer Bundy), and Virginia (who later married George Spayde).<sup>12</sup> George was active in professional and social circles; he served as president of the Park Board, was elected as president of the Board of Realtors in 1921, and was a director of the Oak Park Trust and Savings Bank.<sup>13</sup> Following his retirement in 1939 he moved from 639 N. Oak Park to his summer home at Hemingway Point, Lake Charlevoix, in Michigan where he operated an evergreen nursery business. George Hemingway died of a stroke at Little Traverse Hospital in Petoskey, Michigan on September 26, 1953 at the age of 77. He is buried in Boyne City, Michigan.<sup>14</sup>

Property owners included the following (source: title search):

1880 – Anson T. Hemingway  
1880 – George Butters & wife  
1889 – John Rankin  
1896 – George Rankin  
1899 – Isaac and Margaret Ratcliff  
1908 – George and Anna Hemingway  
1933 – Virginia Hemingway et.al  
1939 – Community Bank & Loan Association of Oak Park  
1942 – Wesley A. Young & wife  
1945 – Chicago Title & Trust Company  
1952 – Paul B. N. & Evelyn Lind  
2004 – Angela Gutierrez & Paul Rinaldi

## **Eben Ezra Roberts, Architect**

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1866, E.E. Roberts was the second child of George Smith Roberts, a woodcarver, and Hattie Whitman Sanborn. He attended public school in Boston and Meredith, New Hampshire before entering Tilton Seminary in New Hampshire, where he studied drafting and architecture. George Smith Roberts was skilled in mechanical drawing and art, and is often credited with instructing the young E.E. Roberts in drafting.<sup>15</sup>

E.E. Roberts' older brother, Thomas Elmer, moved to Chicago to study at Rush Medical Center in 1888. The rest of the Roberts family followed, settling in Oak Park. In 1889, E.E. Roberts found employment with Chicago architect Solon S. Beman, first as a timekeeper and later as a supervisor of construction.<sup>16</sup> Roberts soon opened his own architectural practice in Oak Park, emphasizing residential architecture. Roberts employed several draftsman, including William Gray Purcell in 1902 and John Van Bergen in 1908-09. Roy Hotchkiss was his head draftsman for many years, and later opened his own practice in the Village. His most well-known work is the Art Deco Medial Arts Building at 715 Lake Street.<sup>17</sup> He moved his office to Chicago in 1912 to focus on commercial architecture, but always

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<sup>12</sup> "George Hemingway Dies at 77," *Oak Leaves*, October 1, 1953, p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> "Hemingway Marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Oak Leaves*, March 8, 1945, p. 114B.

<sup>14</sup> "George Hemingway Dies at 77," *Oak Leaves*, October 1, 1953, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> Katherine Keleman. Oak Park Historic Landmark nomination for 625 S. Oak Park Avenue, prepared for property owner Kevin Cuthbert and submitted on July 26, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Unpublished biographical essay on E.E. Roberts written by his grandson, Howard Roberts Drew, dated December 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Don Gunning. Wright Plus 2004 Research Report for the Charles Lorenzen House, 635 Fair Oaks.

remained a resident of Oak Park. Roberts lived with his wife, Rossie (Willey) Roberts in a house of his design at 1019 Superior Street until his death in 1943. They had two children, Margaret Willey (b. 1895) and Elmer Clifford (b. 1896). Roberts made his son Elmer a partner in his practice in 1922, four years before poor health prompted Roberts to partially retire. He continued to live in his house at 1019 Superior until his death in 1943.<sup>18</sup>



Eben E. Roberts, undated

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



(Source: Oak Leaves, September 3, 1904)

Roberts enjoyed a prolific career, and he was fluent in many architectural styles. His early homes were simple, clapboard two-story structures with steep roofs, sometimes with Victorian or Classical detailing. Roberts also designed Queen Anne Style homes, such as the Hoover house of 1896, located at 521 N. Euclid Avenue, which features an octagonal tower, several bays, and a gabled roof. The Sampson Rogers House at 537 N. Euclid Avenue, built in 1895, is constructed in the Shingle Style and has an overhanging attic, off-center entrance, and octagonal bays. In 1896-1897 Roberts designed two large Queen Anne homes for prominent banker brothers Simpson and Joseph Dunlop at 407 and 417 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

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<sup>18</sup> Don Gunning. Wright Plus 2004 Research Report for the Charles Lorenzen House, 635 Fair Oaks.



521 N. Euclid Avenue, 1896



537 N. Euclid Avenue, 1895



407 N. Kenilworth Avenue, 1896



417 N. Kenilworth Avenue, 1897

The 1908 Elliott House, located at 539 N. Oak Park Avenue, employs half-timbering in its Tudor Revival design, a nationally popular style at the time. Roberts also designed such public buildings as the 1908 Prairie Style Scoville Building on Lake Street and Oak Park Avenue and the original Village Hall, at 635 Lake Street, a Neoclassical structure built in 1903 (now demolished). A number of Oak Park churches and schools also were designed by Roberts. The Village of Oak Park has declared several of his buildings as Historic Landmarks, including the Park Grove and Park Manor apartments, 173-181 N. Grove (1922, 1926-27), the Roberts Building, 300-304 N. Grove (1926), and the Maze Branch Library, 845 Gunderson (1936).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> These three buildings were constructed in the later part of Roberts' career. Although E.E. Roberts was still a partner and advisor in the firm, his son, Elmer, drove the designs for their commissions following 1926.



539 N. Oak Park Avenue, 1908



129-151 N. Oak Park, Scoville Building, 1908

Around the turn-of-the-century, Roberts turned away from traditional and revival styles, and he embraced a more modern mode of architecture. He began to design homes with flattened wall planes, strong woodwork, and wide eaves, which lent his houses a rectilinear appearance. According to Frances Steiner, who wrote her 1970 thesis on E.E. Roberts, the A.J. Redmond House, located at 422 Forest Avenue, marks a transformation in Roberts' designs.<sup>20</sup> Built in 1900, the house features broad eaves, heavy porch piers, and greater horizontal emphasis. Succeeding the Redmond House, Roberts designed the Magill House (1903) at 164 N. Euclid Avenue, in the "rectilinear" style, now commonly referred to as the Prairie School. It is composed of heavy interlocking blocks, a wide roof with dormers and deep eaves, and a porch with substantial piers and a low, hipped roof.<sup>21</sup>



422 Forest, A. J. Redmond House, 1900



164 N. Euclid Avenue, Magill House, 1903

Following the Redmond and Magill houses, Roberts designed dozens of solid, two-story, symmetrical homes in the modern, rectilinear style (later referred to as the Prairie or Prairie-influenced), often varying only the dormers. Hipped roofs, full-width porches, and broad eaves are recurrent. Houses such as the geometric Lorenzen House (1908) at 635 Fair Oaks Avenue, with its heavy porch posts, and the Henderson House (1904) at 715 N. Oak

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., Keleman, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Park Avenue, with its low roof and complex arrangement of block-like parts, reflect the influence of the Prairie School on Roberts' architecture.<sup>22</sup>



635 Fair Oaks, Lorenzen House, 1908



715 N. Oak Park, Henderson House, 1904

Roberts' homes of this period reflect his association with the Prairie School. As an Oak Park architect in the early twentieth century, it was impossible to escape the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, who was pioneering a revolutionary movement in the architectural landscape. Roberts was a friend and colleague of the circle of progressive Prairie School architects that included Wright, George Maher, George Elmslie, William Purcell, Dwight Perkins, and Robert Spencer, among others. Though not all of these architects worked out of Oak Park, Wright's influence centered the movement in that town. Roberts' worth lies in the fact that he bridged the radicalism of the Prairie School with the more conservative popular taste.<sup>23</sup> In their Survey of Historical Architecture of the Village of Oak Park, Hasbrouck and Sprague claim that it is "*possible that Roberts was the person responsible for evolving out of the Queen Anne and from suggestions by Wright and Maher, the kind of non-historical rectilinear style that was so common in Oak Park, from about 1900 to 1915.*"<sup>24</sup> Roberts' early adaptations of the style represent the shape Prairie School architecture would take as it disseminated from Oak Park.

## Queen Anne style

The Rankin-Hemingway House has picturesque elements that characterize the Queen Anne style, such as asymmetrical massing, steeply pitched roofs, and large bays. Decorative elements on the house fall under the sub-type referred to as "Free Classic" Queen Anne style, which became common after 1890.<sup>25</sup> The Queen Anne style uses wall surfaces as primary decorative elements, often by incorporating bays, dormers and towers into the design, or by using materials with different textures, such as shingles and clapboards.<sup>26</sup> The Rankin/Hemingway House utilizes many of these elements in its design. Documentation shows that the front gable was once clad in fishscale shingles.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Wilbert R. Hasbrouck and Paul E. Sprague, *Survey of Historical Architecture of the Village of Oak Park, Illinois* (Oak Park: Landmarks Commission of Oak Park, 1974), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Virginia & Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000, p. 264.

<sup>26</sup> McAlester, p. 266.

The Queen Anne style was named and popularized by a group of 19<sup>th</sup>-century English architects led by Richard Norman Shaw. The name had little to do with Queen Anne of England or the formal Renaissance architecture that was dominant during her reign (1702-14). Instead, they borrowed most heavily from late Medieval models of the preceding Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. The spindlework and Free Classic subtypes are American interpretations of the work of Shaw and his colleagues in England.<sup>27</sup>

Spurred on by architectural books, the style then took off across America. In one form or another, its popularity stretched from the late 1870s through the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> The style could be adapted to houses of all sizes. It worked in the city on narrow lots, and in the country on farms and estates. It worked in wood or masonry. Floor plans could be individualized almost endlessly, with porches and verandahs and towers and bays added at will.<sup>29</sup>

## 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 Rankin-Hemingway House was nominated under the following criteria:

- (1) Significance as an example of the architectural development or heritage of the Village of Oak Park;
- (3) Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social 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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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>28</sup> James Massey & Shirley Maxwell, [House Styles in America](#), New York: Penguin Group, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

# Bibliographical References

## Primary and unpublished sources

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Village of Oak Park building permit no. 7184, dated September 11, 1916 for 639 N. Oak Park. Owner: George R. Hemingway, Contractor: Harper & Butendorff. Two story residential addition valued at \$1,000.

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