



# Edgewater Scrapbook

"Notes from the Past, News from the Present"

Vol. XXIX, No. 1

Spring 2018

## Edgewater's Second Railroad

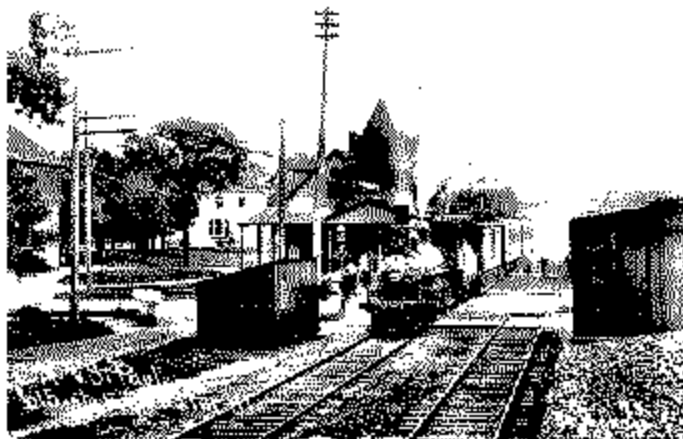
by LeRoy Blommaert

Today it is the CTA's red line, but long before it was that, it was a steam railroad (at least north of Wilson Avenue). This railroad, initially named the Chicago and Evanston, and later the Evanston Division of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, was a long time in coming.

That first run was a low-key affair: one coach with five passengers pulled by a small steam locomotive running backwards, and going from what might be aptly characterized as nowhere to nowhere. It ran from the entrance of Calvary cemetery (where the Chicago and North Western also had a stop) to the depot of another railroad (the Chicago and Pacific) at Chicago Avenue and Larabee (then as now a location some distance from the center of commerce.) The exact date was May 1, 1865. We know that because one of the five passengers, an Evanston native named Joshua Seymour Currey with an eye for history, kept a copy of the first timetable and wrote a description of his experiences. Both were saved and are now in the archives of the Evanston Historical Society. That was no coincidence as Mr. Currey was an officer of the Society and no doubt purposely made that first trip to record it for history.

Few railroads in U.S. history had such a long gestation period from conception to birth. Chartered in

1861 as the Chicago and Evanston railroad by a group of men who founded both Northwestern University and the town of Evanston, including John Evans, for whom the town was named, the proposed railroad was designed to reflect the interests of Evanstonians in obtaining reliable and frequent service to and from Chicago's business district



Station at Bryn Mawr. Real photo postcard taken by Edgewater photographer R.E. Jackson. It is the only known image of a passenger train on the entire line.

at reasonable fares. It would not offer service between downtown Evanston and downtown Chicago until 1886, some 25 years later!

Even at this early date (1861) - less than six years from the date that the Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad first provided a single accommodation train to and from Chicago for residents of Evanston - there was both a dissatisfaction with the fares and frequency of service offered by this road and a realization that competition from a second railroad serving Evanston would be beneficial to the village. Rather than just wait for such a second railroad, the founding fathers took matters into their own hands and successfully sought a charter from the State

legislature for a railroad that would run from Evanston into Chicago. It turned out that getting the charter was the easy part. Securing funding and obtaining the necessary franchises and properties proved much more difficult.

After an initial flurry of activity, there was a long period of inactivity. John Evans, perhaps the railroad's primary mover was appointed territorial governor for Colorado and relocated to Denver, and the Civil War intervened and understandably focused resources and attention elsewhere. It was not until after the Chicago Fire of 1871 that the idea of a second railroad between Chicago and Evanston received renewed interest. By this time, most of the initial incorporators had changed. Instead of being controlled by residents of Evanston, it was now in the hands of Chicagoans.

Various routes and methods of motor power were proposed (including horse power!), however, nothing really happened until the early 1880s. The line was merged with the Chicago and Lake Superior, in which the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul RR had a major interest. It would be the St. Paul that would finally make it happen.

As was mentioned the first train ran from nowhere to nowhere. The aim of the railroad from the very beginning was to connect the business district of Evanston with the business district of Chicago. A move towards that goal was made

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## From the President

Thank you for supporting the Edgewater Historical Society for 30 years!

On Saturday, March 17 at 10 a.m., EHS will hold its 30th annual meeting at the Broadway Armory. This special event will feature two activities.

EHS members annually elect board members for three-year terms. This year members reelected five board members and selected a new fresh face, Michael Meyer, President of Friends of the Edgewater Library, who works at Northwestern University.

Standing for reelection are LeRoy Blommaert, Bob Remer, Marsha Holland, Paul Bonilla and Steve Meiss. Art Arfa has chosen not to run for reelection, but will remain an active docent coordinator for the popular Summer Nights in the Garden. We are grateful for Art's past and continuing service. Reports will be made about the EHS successful past year, including a record number of memberships.

**The Edgewater Historical Society invites you to the 2018 Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 17th**

Did you know the first Edgewater sewers drained directly into Lake Michigan at the end of Bryn Mawr? Or that in 1889, when Edgewater was annexed to Chicago, the state authorized the city to begin construction to reverse the flow of the Chicago River to divert the city's sewage downstream away from the lake? Or that Swift School was named after Mayor George B. Swift, once Commissioner of Public Works, who appointed the Pure Water Commission in 1895, charged with planning to end sewage discharge into the lake? You learn



this and much more, including extensive historic photos, from Dick Lanyon, our speaker and author of several books on the history of Chicago waterways and drainage, once Executive Director of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Free to the Public - Refreshments Will Be Served.

### **21st Century Communications – Can you help us?**

We started our 20th century journey collecting paper... a lot of paper: newspaper articles, personal letters and diaries, documents about Edgewater, books, school year-books, maps, posters and ephemera (about everything from real estate, politics and community events). We communicated to you and the community by paper through mailings, newsletters, fliers, etc. Although paper is still very much with us, the digital age brought new challenges and opportunities.

### **I'd like to tell you about how we are tackling this new digital future and to solicit your ideas and help.**

While paper is still very much part of our life, we have made efforts to join the 21st century. For many years we have had our web site ([www.edgewaterhistory.org](http://www.edgewaterhistory.org)), which has enormous amounts of digitized history, including maps, past newsletters, oral histories, almost 30 years of house tour histories, etc. It is also a place to visit to find out about upcoming and past events.

For several years we have used ConstantContact email software to communicate event information to over 2500 recipients. More recently, we started our Facebook page (under Edgewater Historical Society) to announce events and to provide news and interesting trivia to over 1400 followers; we hope to bring relevance and interest in local history to a younger audience. Interestingly, we have quite a few members who still don't have email, for whom we must "snail mail" information. We're always looking

for ways to use social media to better inform and keep in touch with you, our members and our public, and to tell our story as a museum.

We have a great team who attend to our communications, media and marketing. I would like to give a shout out to them. Kathy Gemperle and Martin Stewart are our two Vice Presidents who together are responsible for much of the content and the dissemination of information we collect. Kathy for years has edited and written much of our quarterly *EHS Scrapbook* (and our great home tour books), a great source of local history and information about EHS. Marty has spearheaded our marketing efforts, and coordinates much of our social media team. Larry Rosen has labored mightily over the years to keep our website going – no small task. LeRoy Blommaert has prepared much of the historic content that has gone into the site, as has our great researcher Marsha Holland more recently. Tiffany Middleton has been invaluable keeping our ConstantContact going after the recent passing of our beloved Treasurer Barb Strauss. Newer additions to our team have been Taylor Heideman, who has given new spirit to our Facebook page, along with Gillian Gryz and the always attentive input from Dorothy Nygren. An unsung hero supporting this has been our wonderful capable and humble volunteer Marieluise Kailing.

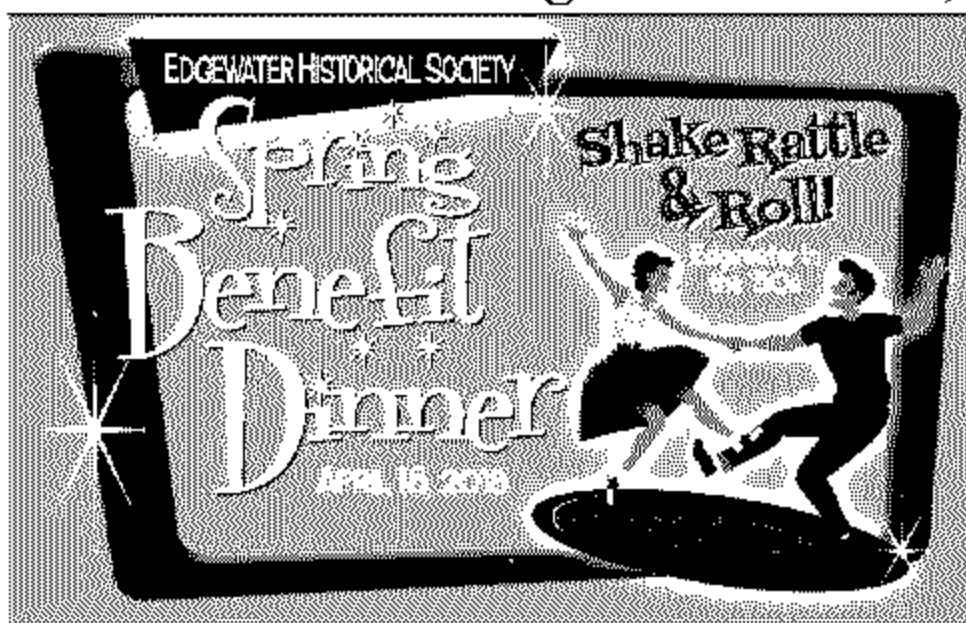
We want to serve your needs, and we would like your feedback on what works, what doesn't, how you would like us to improve. Just contact us via our website. Also, if you have skills or interests in social media, writing or research, we would love to have you volunteer. Thank you in advance.

Robert Remer

# Edgewater Historical Society Spring Benefit Dinner

Wednesday, April 18 from 5:30-9:30 p.m.

## The Breakers at Edgewater Beach, 5333 N. Sheridan

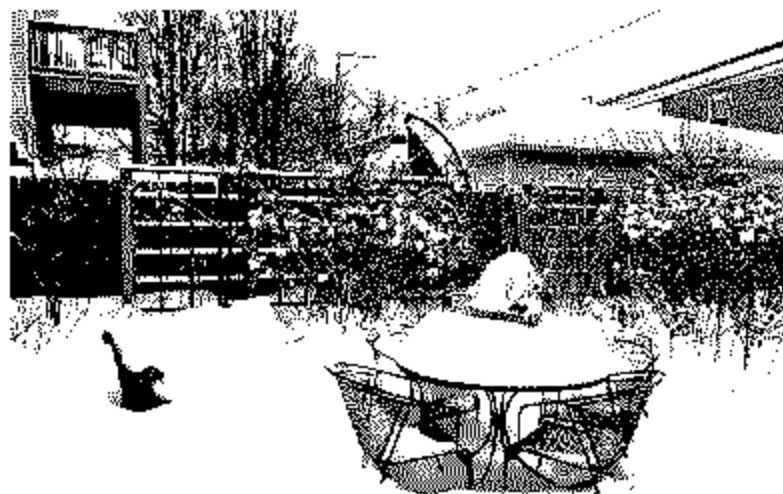


Step back into the 1950s for an unforgettable evening with your friends and neighbors. Think about sideburns, pink Cadillacs, the juke box and 45 rpm records.

Put on your blue suede shoes or your poodle skirt or just come as you are. The event includes a plated dinner, complimentary wine or beer, Silent auction, and Entertainment. DJ Dan will be spinning '50s classics!!!!

Volunteer of the Year Award and introduction of the 2018 Living Treasures. Get your reservations in early; payment is due by April 11. Tickets are \$75 (\$70 each for two or more). \$5 reduced rate parking (cash only).

## POSTCARD



*Nine days of snow tied a record set in 1902. So for over a week it was lovely and fluffy and white. The backyard at the museum is set for a summer gathering and there are a few tracks of squirrels and rabbits. We are happy we have Jose to do the shoveling. The walks were cleared all week long.*

*Winter is still here and we wonder how much more of the "white stuff" will fall.*

*Kathy*

## Edgewater's second railroad

*(Continued from page 1)*

shortly after the first run, when on May 20, 1885, a second terminal was opened further south at the corner of Kinzie and Kingsbury street, just a short distance from the North Western's terminal at Kinzie and Wells. However, the goal of the railroad was to terminate at the Union Depot, then at Canal between Monroe and Adams. To do so the railroad had to cross the busy line of the Chicago and North Western at Kinzie Street and then cross the Chicago River. Understandably, the North Western, not wishing to help a competitor for its Evanston passenger business, objected to the crossing. As is so often the case in our society the dispute ended up in the courts. On June 23, 1885, the U.S. District Court ruled that the North Western had to allow the crossing but that the Chicago and Evanston had to pay compensation to the Chicago and North Western. Later in the year the crossing track was installed and a bridge constructed across the river and trains began to operate into and out of the Union Depot.

Extension of operations north into downtown Evanston from Calvary cemetery, interestingly enough given the motive of the original incorporators, did not occur until 1886 – over a year after the first train ran on the line. Evanston was a much more developed community in 1886 than it was in 1861 and much more concerned with its residential quality of life. A second railroad did not seem as urgent as it appeared in 1861, and residents were just as focused on the negatives as the positives of railroads. One of the key points of negotiation between the City of Evanston and the railroad's management was the location of the right of way. The railroad wanted a location closer to the lakeshore; however, residents objected and the City preferred either a right of way west of the Chicago and North Western tracks in less developed west Evanston or

a right of way immediately east of North Western tracks. It was the latter option that was finally agreed to. A second point of negotiation was fares. The City wanted to establish a fare structure as part of the grant of the franchise; the railroad objected that such a condition was an infringement of its management rights. On this point the railroad prevailed.

The City of Evanston did not want operations to begin until siding tracks had been installed. On July 17, 1886, a picnic train went as far as Dempster Street and on August 2 of the same year, operations began to Church Street, where the St. Paul later built a very substantial brick depot, just a half block from the North Western depot at Davis Street. Extension of the line into southern Wilmette did not occur until the end of 1888.



*North Edgewater station (at Granville)*

In the first year of operations between Chicago and downtown Evanston, the railroad operated a total of 18 trains per weekday, with a median transit time of 50 minutes. In 1888 the number of trains had increased to 34 and the median transit time had decreased to 40 minutes. In 1895 the number of trains had increased to 42 and in 1899 it had increased to 54 – the highest number for any year for which a timetable is known to exist. The median transit time, however, remained the same at 40 minutes.

Edgewater's founder J.L. Cochran had persuaded the St. Paul to add a stop in Edgewater at Bryn Mawr, and an August 1886 timetable shows that Edgewater had 12 weekday trains. The number of trains had increased to 27 in 1887 and then again to 33 in 1888, where it remained until 1892. The number of

trains remained in the low 40s through 1897. However, the October 22, 1899 timetable showed 54 trains – an all time high. North Edgewater at Granville generally had four to six trains fewer than Edgewater, although in 1899 it had 54 trains – the same as Edgewater. In 1899 the average time to Union Station was 26.3 minutes from Edgewater and two additional minutes from North Edgewater.

Stops within the City of Chicago were added at Birchwood (present day Jarvis), North Edgewater (present day Granville), and Sheridan Park (present day Wilson) – all in 1890 or 1891. The depots at these stops were paid for by the developers who owned the land nearby, as was also the depot at Edgewater (present day Bryn Mawr), and probably also Argyle Park (present day Argyle). Apparently, it was the railroad that paid for the construction of all the stations in Evanston.

In May 1900 an event occurred in Chicago that would have a major impact on the Evanston Division of the St. Paul Railroad and on those who rode her. That event was opening for public service of the long planned, and long awaited, but long delayed Northwestern Elevated Railroad from the Loop north to Wilson Avenue. It was Chicago's fourth and last elevated company to actually operate trains.

While the opening was a boon for north side Chicagoans south of Argyle who lived near its stations, affording them a faster trip to the Chicago downtown business district, it had the opposite effect on those living further north, particularly those in Rogers Park, but also those in Edgewater. And that is because the St. Paul, anticipating a decline of its business by the opening of the Northwestern Elevated severely cut back the number of trains it operated between Evanston and Chicago. From a high of 54 less than a year before, it reduced the number to only 14. These trains primarily operated in

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## Edgewater's second railroad

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the rush hour. Initially the St. Paul had proposed running what in effect would be shuttle service between Evanston and the Northwestern Elevated terminal at Wilson – and may actually have initiated it – but there was strong opposition to it from riders and so it continued to run service to Union Station but at a considerably reduced frequency.

Prior to the opening of the Northwestern Elevated in 1900, there were more trains on the St. Paul's Evanston branch than on its other two branches. And yet despite what would appear to be a successful operation, the St. Paul very early on sought to either electrify its Evanston line or else transfer operations to another entity that would operate electric trains over its right of way. We do not know the reason for this view. Perhaps it was because it had been thwarted in its earlier attempt to extend its line north along the North Shore to link with its mainline to Milwaukee somewhere around Rondout. The Evanston branch was considerably shorter than the other two branches and was primarily a commuter passenger operation, whereas the other two routes were on its main lines north and northwest both for freight and long distance passenger service. In contrast, the Evanston branch just went to Wilmette and had limited freight business.

Interestingly, a "solution" involving electrification of the line was advanced very early – 1894. This was shortly after the Northwestern Elevated had been incorporated and before any construction had commenced. It was advanced by the St. Paul itself. However, the City of Chicago would not alter the franchise to allow for the substitution of electric for steam power. The interurban Chicago and Milwaukee Electric railway next advanced a proposal to run its trains south over the St. Paul right of way and onto the planned elevated of the Northwestern Elevated. (By 1899 the

interurban had extended its service from Waukegan to Evanston.) Nothing came of this proposal either. When electrification did occur it was by extension of the Northwestern Elevated north over the St. Paul's Evanston division.

In 1904 the St. Paul Railroad and the Northwestern Elevated finally signed an agreement that permitted the Northwestern to extend its service into Evanston over the tracks of the St. Paul, contingent on approvals by the City of Evanston and the City of Chicago. However, it wasn't until 1907 that such approvals were given. In March the City of Evanston gave its approval for electrification of the line. That approval was contingent on the tracks being elevated by the end of 1910. The approval of the City of Chicago followed in July. Its conditions were that 3rd rail operations were prohibited (even though they existed at ground level on other lines) and that service be provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Waiting for the first "L" train at Bryn Mawr, May 16, 1908. Real photo postcard by Edgewater photographer R.E. Jackson.

Once the final approval was given, work proceeded rapidly to allow service to begin. Track was re-aligned, stations were erected, trolley wire strung, the elevated structure extended north from Wilson to Lawrence, and a ramp built from the extended elevated structure down to the ground between Lawrence and Ainslie (similar to the one that exists today on the Ravenswood/Brown Line west from the Western avenue stop). Stations were erected at all the former commuter stops on the St. Paul. In Chicago they were (in south to north order): Argyle (Argyle

Park), Edgewater (Bryn Mawr), North Edgewater (Granville), Rogers Park (Morse), and Birchwood (Jarvis). Stations were added at Hayes Avenue (later renamed Loyola), and Howard Avenue (later renamed Howard Street.)

The stations were rather rudimentary, consisting of a short wooden elevated platform access to which was through a short station house at one end that was adjacent to the street. All were placed between the two tracks. Photos of all the Chicago stations are known to exist except for the one at Granville. They were rudimentary because they were designed to be replaced in a few years after the tracks were elevated. Remarkably, almost all this work was completed in just a few months in late 1907 and early 1908.

When the "L" opened through Edgewater on May 16, 1908, the St. Paul ceased service between downtown Chicago and the communities of Evanston, Rogers Park, and Edgewater. Only four trains made the journey on the line south of Wilson Ave, and they stopped short of Chicago's Union Station.

While the "L" would transform Edgewater from a predominately a "suburban" community of single family homes to a part of the urban fabric with frequent service downtown 24/7, it was the St. Paul that gave Edgewater its start. Without rail service, it is very doubtful that Cochran and his partners would have bought the land when and where they did. Edgewater's first business district at Broadway, Ridge and Bryn Mawr developed near the St. Paul station. By the time the "L" came in 1908, the business district was almost fully developed.

For a more detailed account of this railroad see "Competing Rails: The Milwaukee Road's Legacy in Evanston and Wilmette" published by the Shore Line Interurban Historical Society, 2011.

Additional sources: *Chicago Tribune* digital archives and the *Evanston Review*.

# Unfinished Edgewater

## *A Shopping Center for the Automobile Age*

by Marsha Holland

On either side of the Clark/Ashland intersection just south of Ridge are two seemingly unrelated 1920s apartment blocks that were meant by developer Victor C. Carlson to be part of larger shopping complex called Market Square. The name was borrowed from Howard Van Doren Shaw's downtown Lake Forest village-style shopping district, which opened in 1916 and is considered the United States' first true purpose-built shopping center.

Shaw's Tudor-influenced design, featured diagonal street parking in front of the stores, and second story walk-up apartments. Carlson, however, had a more urban vision for his 1920s mixed commercial/residential developments in Chicago. His intention was to create mid-rise apartment housing over shops, within the existing street grid system. He also provided indoor parking for the shoppers and residents.

In the late 1920s, Carlson saw an opportunity in Edgewater to build a shopping center at the junction of Ashland, Clark, Peterson and Ridge. Ashland had recently been widened to four traffic lanes. Peterson also was in the process of being widened to four traffic lanes. Clark and Ridge were historic regional highways, and Clark additionally was both a major retail street and public transit corridor. The location must have seemed an ideal place to create a shopping hub for the automobile age.

Here is how the *Chicago Tribune* described the Carlson's proposed development in January 1927:

*What is perhaps one of the most elaborate schemes for the development of a new uptown shopping center, involving an ultimate expenditure of approxi-*

*mately \$2,000,000 in buildings, is announced by Victor C. Carlson, Evanston and Chicago builder and realtor, for the intersection of Clark, Ashland, Ridge, and Peterson Avenues. This big project is to be called "Market Square." The first unit of the proposed new shopping center is to be erected at the southeast corner of Clark and Ridge and will be a three story fire-proof structure of Italian design. Later on work will start on the second and third units. A large fire-proof market building will be unit No. 2 and will occupy the entire block of the northeast frontage on Ridge Avenue, extending from Clark to Paulina Street. Unit No. 3 will be a large automobile sales and service building just south of the market building, fronting on Clark and Ashland.*

As it turned out, only the first phase and part of the second phase of this project were built. The first phase was what we call the Maybelline building, because that cosmetics company occupied ground floor space from late 1928 to 1967, first as a tenant and then, after 1939, as owner of the entire building. The residential portion of the second phase at 5908-5922 N. Clark, called Hillcrest by Carlson, was finished in 1929. Its location is on one of the highest places in Edgewater just west of the "ridge" along Clark Street. But the "market building" portion of the second phase, intended to extend all the way to Ridge on the west side Clark, was never completed, nor was the third phase automobile sales and service building south of the Hillcrest. These structures were casualties of the October 1929 stock market crash and ensuing depression.

We cannot know if Carlson and other land owners, without the collapse of the real estate market during the depression, would have succeeded in developing all the corners of this mega-intersection into a true retail district. Probably that would not have happened because the wide streets and heavy automobile traffic would have posed the same barrier to pedestrian cross-shopping that we see today.

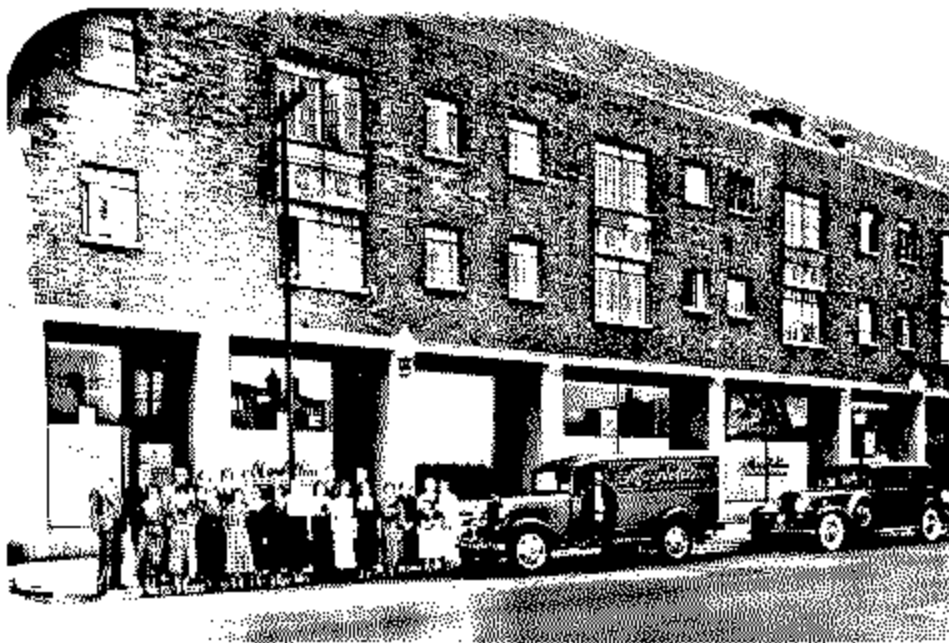
What remains of Carlson's vision are two interesting mixed retail/residential buildings, incorporating design features meant to attract middle class families. The architectural firm for both was the Chicago partnership of George D. Conner and William J. O'Connor, who had just won a *Chicago Tribune* home design competition. During this same year (1927) the partnership designed three other apartment buildings for Carlson, all in Evanston.

The first building – a triangular structure bracketed by Clark and Ridge – had about 26,700 square feet of retail space on the first level and fifty-two studio and one-bedroom apartments on the two upper floors. Half of the apartments overlooked the roof of the covered loading dock. This area was advertised as a private landscaped courtyard providing a large playground for children as well as recreational space for adults. Parking for 25 cars was located in the basement, accessed by a ramp from the adjoining public alley. The formal residential entry on Ridge featured boldly designed terrazzo floors, lighting, and winding staircase, while the building façade, with a roofline punctuated by cement urns, stood out for its elegant simplicity and very large ground floor plate glass shop windows.

The steel skeleton frame made easy subdivision of the shop space, according to the needs of different tenants. In 1928, when the building had just been completed, the shops on the Clark side were about one-third occupied, but the retail space on the Ridge side was entirely empty. It must have been a relief to Victor Carlson when Thomas Lyle Williams approached him in late 1928 about leasing all the Ridge-facing shop space for the headquarters of the Maybelline Company.

Started in 1915 on Chicago's near south side, Maybelline most recently had been located on the second floor of the Emerman Building at 4750 N.

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Maybelline employees in front of the Ridge side of the Building at Clark and Ridge

### Unfinished Edgewater (Continued from page 6)

Sheridan almost since the building opened in 1921. The new Carlson property was a good fit for Maybelline, which needed more room for its business office, as well as enough space for employees assembling and packaging products manufactured elsewhere. The rear covered loading dock accommodated the expanding fleet of Maybelline panel trucks used to supply local retailers (see the early 1930s photo of the staff and one of the trucks in front of the Ridge side of the building). In 1928, Williams also moved his home from farther south on Sheridan Road to the Edgewater Beach Apartments, which was ready for occupancy in 1928.

Carlson started construction on the phase two Hillcrest on the west side of Clark Street in February, 1929. This was a massive six-story structure containing 70 apartments, which Carlson advertised as affording lake views from the east-facing upper windows. Inside parking for 144 cars was available in an attached rear structure entered through a ramp from Clark Street at the southeastern corner of the building. The west-facing apartments had views of a landscaped 13,000 square

foot garden and children's playground on top of the parking garage. The Hillcrest apartment units were a mix of two, three, and four rooms, advertised as being larger than other comparable apartment buildings.

Unfortunately, the Hillcrest street-level façade has greatly changed for the worse over the years, and no image has been found to tell us how the building looked originally.

Multi colored stone has been mortared onto the first story exterior and, in the process, the shop windows have been made smaller, so the Hillcrest ground level has lost the airy lightness made possible by the steel skeleton construction. A "Moorish" style arched center residential entrance door flanked by two narrow side windows remains, but these features disappear into the expanse of stone. The Hillcrest's first story exterior cladding may have been the Belmont limestone Carlson used extensively on other buildings.

The large number of parking spaces included in the Hillcrest building - twice the modern requirement of one space per apartment - were intended to serve shoppers at the purely retail "market building" to the north, which, in early 1929, Carson still planned on constructing. We have

no idea what Carlson's design for this component of the shopping complex might have been. It could have been a two-level retail structure with a second story mezzanine, similar to the design of Edgewater's 1923 Woodruff Arcade at Devon and Broadway, with the difference that the upper windows of Carlson's market building probably would have been far larger, so that the retail character of the tenancy would have been more immediately apparent from the outside.

On the other hand, Carlson's Edgewater market building design might have taken the form of a now-vanished commercial development idea - in addition to ground level stores, putting retail shops on the second and third floors of office buildings. In 1922, the owner of the Emerman Building advertised this setup in the February 11 issue of *The Economist*:

*The Emerman Building will be featured particularly as a shop building, the 2nd and 3rd floors having display windows on the corridors, and in other ways being similar to the Stevens, Republic, and North American Buildings. Therefore, it will appeal to high grade and responsible tenants.*

Carlson included second and third level shops over ground level stores in three projects his company constructed in 1928 and 1929 - the six-story office building at the southeast corner of Clark and Howard, and the two seven-story office buildings at 608-612 and 618-626 Church Street in Evanston. So he might have intended that the Edgewater market building be a taller structure with office uses over three levels of stores and shops. The plans were apparently not published, so we will never know.

Victor Carlson was born in South Evanston, which at the time had not been annexed to Evanston. He left school after the eighth grade and joined his father's masonry contracting company. In 1905, at the age of 17, he set up his own contracting business in partnership with Oscar L.

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# News from the Front: Committee Communiqués

## HISTORIC SITES

Co-Chairs: Thom Greene and LeRoy Blommaert



Inventory of historic buildings on Broadway continues. Thanks to Marsha and Thom.

Some of the board went to Wing Hoe's for one last dinner and took photos of the interior. It has been a supper club since the early 50s and was there when the Edgewater Beach Hotel was busy all the time. A developer is suggesting a four story building for the site.

## PROGRAM

Co-Chairs: Bob Remer and John Holden



The committee met to look over the proposed future programs for the year.

The next Book Group meeting will be on April 14th and the subject is baseball.

## BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Chair: Reggie Griffin



Some changes in the board of directors will be presented at the General meeting on

March 17. See you there.

## MEMBERSHIP

Chair: LeRoy Blommaert



Thanks to all who have sent in their memberships so promptly. We hope to have a record year. Please consider a gift membership for a friend especially one who likes to read and doesn't get out much.

## PROPERTY

Chair: Thom Greene



The snow is shoveled and the first leak was repaired. The second leak took us by surprise but several people stepped up to help and every thing is back in order.

## FINANCE

Co-Chairs: Bob Remer and Mark Richardson



A new budget was approved and some funding set aside for additional workers to keep the museum running smoothly.

## COLLECTIONS

Chair: LeRoy Blommaert



Work continues on the collections. Tom Walsh has been assisting with the search for images for the Timeline exhibit.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Co-Chairs: Kathy Gemperle and Martin Stewart



The next newsletter will come out in May. By that time we will have a schedule for the new exhibits.

## FUNDRAISING

Chair: Martin Stewart



Our big event is April 18th and we hope you can make it to the Breakers on April 18 from 5:30 - 9:30 p.m. It will be a great evening of dining and music and visiting with old friends and neighbors. Parking is \$5 cash so there is no need to worry.

## Let's Rock

### Notice

If you are a member, and do not receive emails from us, either we don't have your email, or we have an incorrect one (we send at least one email a month). If this is the case, please go to our website ([www.EdgewaterHistory.org](http://www.EdgewaterHistory.org)) and use the Contact Us form to furnish your email.

We rely on emails to notify members of programs and events.



## Unfinished Edgewater

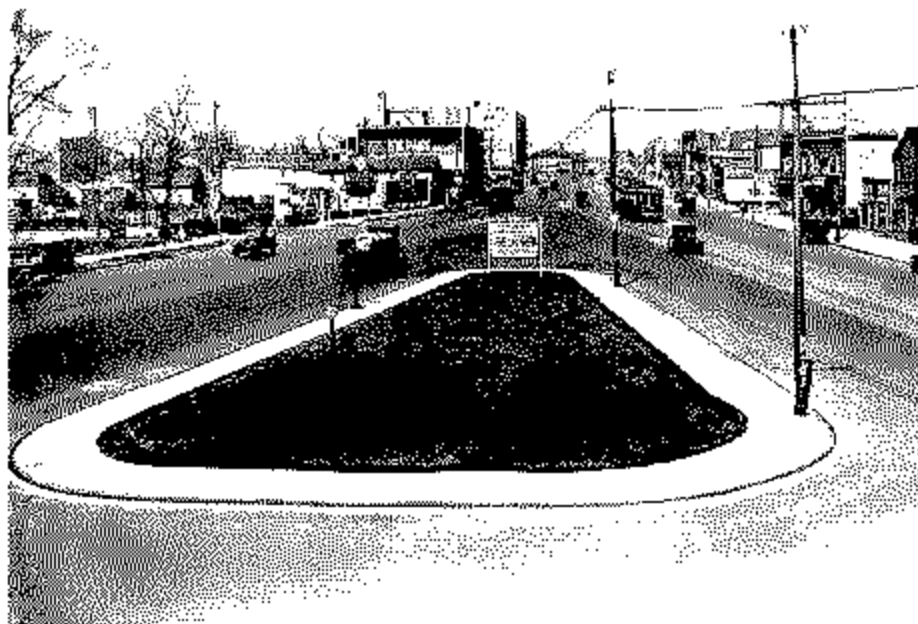
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Swanstrom. After about a year they ran into financial problems and became bankrupt, but they were able to satisfy their creditors and emerge from bankruptcy in 1907. For the next few years Carlson apparently worked on smaller projects, perhaps again with his father. His career gained momentum in 1914, when he built a six-flat located on the southwest corner of Ashland and North Shore. In 1917 he built what appears to have been his first mixed-use project, incorporating forty-five apartments and six retail stores at the southwest corner of Ashland and Montrose. By 1921 he was well enough established to incorporate as the Victor C. Carlson Company.

In 1922 he undertook the first of his series of large scale developments that would so significantly change the face of downtown Evanston - the eight-story Library Plaza Hotel on Orrington Avenue, which advertised an elevator allowing guests to reach automobiles parked in the basement garage without going outside. In 1923 he built the Orrington Hotel, the most prestigious of his developments and the most luxurious. The Orrington, completed in only 10 months, included 300 guest rooms, 75 apartments, and a roof garden with views of Lake Michigan. He sold most of his projects to investors after completion, but he retained the Orrington Hotel and, in 1927, used his ownership as a vehicle for selling bonds backed by its revenue.

He completed so great a volume of projects in the mid to late 1920s that his company must have had by then a fairly large staff. He also operated three offices - at 65 E. Washington in the Loop, at 509 Davis Street in Evanston, and at 5729 N. Clark, the latter in the just completed first phase of Market Square. If that were not ambitious enough, he purchased and operated for several years the Evanston low power radio station WEHS. In the

midst of these responsibilities he was involved in Edgewater community affairs. As a member of the donor committee of the Tenth Congressional District Men's Service Club, he was a contributor to and present at the dedication of the granite War Memorial at Ashland and Clark on November 11, 1928.



Where Clark and Ashland meet in 1926 after the widening of Ashland, looking north towards the planned Market Square. The War Memorial was installed at this site.

The stock market crash of October, 1929, came at a time when Carlson's company had a large number of just-completed apartments and stores in the initial stages of leasing. The interruption in revenue brought him to bankruptcy in 1930, and he lost ownership to creditors of those properties he had not yet sold. Based on his payment of real estate tax on the property in the 1930s, and a 1931 *Chicago Tribune* news story, Edgewater resident Harry Bairstow acquired ownership of the Maybelline building because he had given Carlson a 99 year lease rather than selling him the land. Architect Benjamin H. Marshall acquired the Orrington Hotel from the creditor's committee in 1933, only to lose it himself through bankruptcy the following year.

Carlson never again played so prominent a role in mixed-use development, but he found a niche designing and manufacturing

prefabricated suburban homes. He built several in Evanston and sold more elsewhere in the Chicago area in the late 1930s. After World War II he was active in meeting the need for affordable family housing using prefabricated components. In old age he lived in an apartment on Grove Street in downtown Evans-

ton.

He died at Ravenswood Hospital at age 89 in 1977, and is buried at Rosehill Cemetery. His lasting legacy is that he strove to construct well-designed buildings, almost all of which are still standing, and still put to their original use.

Sources: A well researched and illustrated tribute to Victor C. Carlson by Jim Craig provides more detail on his life and achievements (<https://goo.gl/qNUN8H>). Other sources used were the *Chicago Tribune* archives, U.S. census information, city directories, and *The Economist* real estate journal.

A chronological list of Carlson's known buildings and their architects will be posted on the EHS website along with this article.



## Teaser 38

In our last issue we asked: What internationally renowned entertainment personality once attended Easter Services at an Edgewater Church. And what was the church and in what year did it happen?

Answer: The internationally renowned entertainment personality was Bing Crosby. The Church was St. Ita's Roman Catholic Church, and the date was April 6, 1947. That date's entry in the book "Bing: Day by Day" reads as follows: "While in Chicago Bing attended Easter Services at St. Ita Church, Catalpa Avenue and stayed at the Edgewater Beach Hotel (suite 471-7A)"

The information is corroborated in the May 1947 issue of the St. Ita Olympian, which contains the additional information that it was the 9:00 a.m. service that he attended. The Olympian was a monthly mimeographed newsletter chronicling the activities of St. Ita parishioners, both past and present. Bing Crosby was probably the most famous person to ever have attended church services in Edgewater, and one of the most famous persons to have ever visited Edgewater.

"Bing: Day by Day" also confirms that he stayed at least once at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. We have not been able to confirm any other stay at the hotel.

There is an additional Edgewater connection to Bing Crosby; it is through his wife, Dixie Lee Crosby, who was born Wilma W. Wyatt. She attended Senn High School, but lived not in Edgewater, but in Rogers Park with her parents Nora and Evan Wyatt. Their home was a three-story apartment building at 7353 N. Paulina. It still stands. Dixie Lee presumably took the Clark Street streetcar to school. Her home was only a block away, and the school just slightly further from the car tracks.

A 2017 DNA story alleges that Bing Crosby made a major financial

contribution for an organ to be installed in St. Ita church. While this is possible, perhaps even plausible, no credible evidence for it has yet to be found.

## Teaser 39

Greg Borzo, in his book "Chicago's Fabulous Fountains," identifies 150 public fountains. Edgewater has but one. Where is it? When was it installed? And for whom was it named?

## Edgewater History Book Club

The Edgewater History Book Club's discussion at the Edgewater Branch Library on February 10 was based on "Prairie on Fire: Chicago's Harold Washington and the Politics of Race" by Gary Rivlin. The meeting was well attended and even more lively than usual. Those who had not read the book came to hear about the history of Harold Washington's political career and the tumultuous years from 1983 to 1987 when he served as Chicago's mayor.

As always, the discussion was made meaningful by the sharing of personal memories by those actively involved in the events described in

## Edgewater Beach Hotel exhibit continues

The Edgewater Beach Hotel exhibit will continue by popular demand into the summer. If you haven't stopped by yet, there is still time. We may have some new additions to it in May, after the Made in Chicago exhibit is packed up.



the book – in this case, especially the experiences of a journalist, a photographer, a reform political activist, and a civil rights lawyer. The topic of the next meeting of the book club on Saturday, April 14, will be a Chicago baseball history; the book is "When Chicago Ruled Baseball" by Bernard A. Weisberger. Please join us. You never know who is going to be there to share knowledge and experiences.



Chicago History book club participants (left to right) John Lach, Michele Allen, John Holden and Margie Fritz-Birch, looking over the photos brought by Allan Koss, who was a news reporter in the Harold Washington era.

# Made in Chicago

The fabulous Made In Chicago exhibit continues at the Edgewater Historical Society. Curator, Andrew Clayman has visited the exhibit several times and will be back again before coming at the beginning of May to pack everything up. So if you haven't seen it please make sure you come soon.

We have received some unusual items to add to the collection including the one below and to the right.



Cast Iron French Fry Cutter (c. 1930s), Bloomfield Mfg. Co., 333S Wells St., Armour Square Park

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I would like to support the Edgewater Historical Society by becoming a member for 2018.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual          | \$25* | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (65 and over) | \$10   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron              | \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Org.        | \$75   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not for Profit Org. | \$25  | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Lifetime  | \$1000 |

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Please check:  One year  Two years  Three years

Multiply number of years by price per year: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Museum donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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For further information, call: 773-506-4849

Are you interested in learning more about committees and activities of the Edgewater Historical Society? If you check the box below, a board member will call you to discuss where your interests may match our needs.

I would like to volunteer to help EHS continue their work in preserving history in Edgewater.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Public Notice

This newsletter is published by the **Edgewater Historical Society**, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1988 and affiliated with the Edgewater Community Council.

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**We Welcome Guest  
Columnists At Any Time**



## For the Family Tree

Thanks for your support and encouragement.

If you have not yet sent in your renewal, please remember to do so soon. We count on your support to keep the museum open.

Thanks to our volunteer photographers who are ready at our events to record history.

If this is the first newsletter you have received, and you did not recently join the Edgewater Historical Society, it may be that someone gave you a gift membership. If so, a letter will follow.

Visit our Website at:  
[www.EdgewaterHistory.org](http://www.EdgewaterHistory.org)

Previous Issue: Vol. XXVIII, No. 4  
The deadline for the next issue is May 1, 2018

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