

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT
NORTH POINT NORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT

I. Name

Historic: Gilman's Subdivision of Part of Lockwood's Addition
Current: North Point North Historic District

II. Location

The district includes the residential area bounded approximately by North Wahl Avenue, Park Place, the northwest (rear) lot line of North Summit Avenue, North Downer Avenue and the north and east lot lines of St. Mary's Hospital and all of Lake Park.

III. Classification

District

IV. Owner of Property

Multiple ownership

V. Description

A. Boundaries

The district includes all of Lake Park and the adjacent residential area extending to the west. Lake Park is bounded approximately by Kenwood Boulevard on the north; North Wahl Avenue and North Lake Drive on the west; the north curb line of the Lincoln Memorial Drive-North Terrace Avenue access road and a line drawn extending said curb line southeasterly to the lake shore on the south; and the shore of Lake Michigan on the east. The North Point North residential area extends west from North Wahl Avenue beginning at the intersection of North Wahl Avenue and North Terrace Avenue; thence, northerly along North Terrace Avenue to the south property line of 2411-15 North Terrace; then northwesterly along said south property line and northeast along the west property line until it intersects with the south property line of 2430 North Lake Drive; thence west along said south property line until it intersects with North Downer Avenue/North Lake Drive; thence north along North Downer Avenue to the west (rear) lot line of North Summit Avenue; thence northeast along said west (rear) lot line until it intersects East Park Place; thence east along East Park Place to its intersection with North Lake Drive/North Wahl Avenue; thence south along North Wahl Avenue to the beginning point.

B. General Character

North Point North Historic District or Gilman's Subdivision as it was once known, is a clearly definable part of the upper middle class residential area on

Milwaukee's upper east side. It is characterized by wide streets, large, well-built, architect-designed homes, and by commanding views of Lake Michigan.

Situated atop a bluff overlooking the lake, North Point North Historic District is located about two miles northeast of Milwaukee's central business district. The historic district lies just northeast of the North Point Water Tower, a Victorian Gothic structure surrounded by a formal park that serves as the demarcation between the North Point North and older North Point South residential areas.

"North Point" refers to a bulge in the coastline of Lake Michigan that, in conjunction with "South Point", forms Milwaukee's harbor. The North Point area becomes one of Milwaukee's prestigious residential neighborhoods, largely because of the panoramic lake views that the bluff sites commanded.

North Point North Historic District includes the portion of the bluff that was known as Gilman's Subdivision of Park of Lockwood's Addition. The district includes most of the blocks that comprised the original subdivision, some peripheral properties having been excluded because they differ in land use. Exclusively residential, this portion of the district is bordered by Lake Park to the east and to the south, by St. Mary's Hospital and other institutional and commercial buildings to the west, and by another residential neighborhood to the north. North Point North is built-up mostly with large, masonry, single-family homes, although it includes a number of lowrise apartment buildings as well as former mansions that have been converted into multi-family dwellings. There are few vacant lots within the district.

Lake Park extends from Water Tower Park north to Kenwood Boulevard and is bounded on the west by North Wahl Avenue and North Lake Drive. It is a wooded park containing a golf course, various pavilions and picnic areas connected by a system of curving pathways and roads. It provides the principal focus for the adjacent residential district and its proximity was instrumental in the development of North Point North as an upper-middle-class residential area.

The residences in North Point North are considerably larger than the houses in most Milwaukee neighborhoods. Most of them were built for prominent Milwaukee citizens during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and they reflect both the high status of their original owners and the prosperity of the era in which they were built. Most of the residences are two and a half stories in height, the partial third story often intended for servants' quarters. There are also eight apartment buildings in the district, which range from two to four stories in height. The smallest contain four units each and the largest contains twenty-four units. With some exceptions, the buildings are predominantly brick masonry. The most frequently used exterior materials are brown brick with wood and limestone trim, but there are a number of stone-faced residences as well. There is also some use of stucco, especially in conjunction with brick. In addition, there are a few clapboard structures.

The architectural styles represented in the district include the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, German and English Renaissance, English Tudor, English Arts and Crafts, and Prairie styles. English-styled residences predominate; some academically faithful to their European models and others vaguely reminiscent of

them; but in general, the designs reflect the eclecticism that pervaded architecture during the early part of the twentieth century. Exterior decoration is rich, but restrained in nature, giving the buildings a dignified character. Almost all of the buildings were custom designed by architects and exhibit a high quality of design and workmanship.

North Point North's character is partially based on the plan of its streets, which departs from the Cartesian grid that dominates most of the city. Platted before the city grid had been extended that far north, the district's streets were laid parallel to the bluff's edge. Hence, the major streets – North Wahl Avenue, North Terrace Avenue, North Lake Drive, and North Summit Avenue – run into a southwest to northeast direction, and the side streets – East Bradford Avenue and East Bellevue Place – run northwest to southeast. On the edges of the district trapezoidal lots are created where these streets intersect with the city's grid. However, in the interior of the district, the lots are all rectangular, although they vary considerably in size. The blocks are long and narrow, so most of the houses face the streets that run northeast, the length of the district; but, at the ends of blocks, the houses turn to face the side streets. There are no alleys in the district; therefore, properties meet back to back. Garages are generally located at the rear of the properties and are reached by long driveways. In general, the houses cover the major portion of their lots. Although they are more generous than in more modest Milwaukee neighborhoods, the side yards are not ample, a factor that contributes to the urban quality of the neighborhood. A consistency in the siting of the residences is established by the fact that most of their facades are parallel to the streets they face. Their setbacks, however, vary considerably and the resulting undulation of the streetscape is one of the traits that distinguish North Point North from most other Milwaukee Neighborhoods.

The district includes one small park, Gilman's Triangle, in addition to Lake Park. It is a small grassy triangle formed by the intersection of Lake Drive with Downer and Bradford Avenues. The district is strongly identified with Lake Park, which bounds the district on the east and on the south. The residences on North Wahl Avenue face the park, which extends to the edge of the bluff and continues down the ravine to Lincoln Memorial Drive and the coast of Lake Michigan below. Lake Park extends both north and south of the district and thus links several eastside neighborhoods. Designed in the 1890's by the renowned landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted and Company, the park is outstanding for its landscaping and planning.

North Point North is a well-preserved neighborhood. Except for the repavement of its streets and the removal of the majority of its Harp Luminaries (original Milwaukee streetlights), North Point North is much the same in appearance as it was in the early 1900's. Most of the houses have been well maintained and alterations have been minimal. Some in-fill structures have been built over the years, but most of these later buildings are somewhat compatible with their surroundings in scale and materials. There are approximately 190 residential buildings and 90 accessory buildings, or a total of 280 buildings in the district.

VI. Significance

Date Built: 1890-1930

The North Point North Historic District is significant as a intact upper middle class residential area displaying high quality domestic architecture by some of Milwaukee's leading architects. It is historically significant as the home of many prominent Milwaukeeans. Lake Park is significant as an outstanding example of landscape design by the internationally known landscape architecture firm of Frederick Law Olmsted and Company.

The North Point District and Lake Park have previously been designated as Milwaukee landmarks.

VII. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the North Point North Historic District be designated as an historic district in accordance with the provisions of Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

Our recommendation is based on the previous recognition accorded the district and the areas of significance enumerated above.

VIII. History

The North Point North area, known as Gilman's subdivision of Lockwood's Addition, was platted in 1876 by Winthrop W. Gilman. An 1876 Milwaukee Sentinel article announced in intentions:

Mr. W. W. Gilman has settled the tax-title certificates against his lands in the First Ward, and will immediately plat them and bring them into the market. The property is known as the "Lockwood Tract" and has become valuable since Mr. Gilman owner of it.¹

Although subdivided in 1876, North Point North did not begin to develop until the 1890's. This slow growth can be attributed to the lack of complete sewer and water improvements, which were not installed until 1900 in some parts of the district.

In his book, The Expansion of an Industrial City: Milwaukee 1880-1910, Roger David Simon notes:

It is clear that those who could afford to purchase a house in the eighteenth ward (North Point and surrounds) expected to move into a dwelling with running water, flush toilets, and a finished street, on a block with good access to the rest of the city.²

This observation is not only useful in understanding the slow growth in Gilman's Subdivision, but explains the comparatively rapid growth of the area north of the subdivision, known as Prospect Hill. Although subdivided much later (1893), Prospect

¹ Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, May 1, 1876, p.8.

² Roger David Simon, The Expansion of an Industrial City: Milwaukee, 1880-1910, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1971, p. 271.

Hill was immediately provided with complete sewer and water service. This was apparently paid for by the developers in anticipation of increased property values and rapid sales. The results occurred as planned, causing an unusual situation, where an area farther from the business district, and less accessible to schools and horse cars proceeded Gilman's Subdivision in development. Only ten houses had been built in North Point North by 1900, even though the area north and west of it extending as far north as present day Locust Street was already extensively built up.

After 1900, development in the district accelerated. About seventy-five buildings were erected in the first decade, fifty-eight in the teens, and forty-seven in the twenties. After 1930, new construction in North Point North virtually ceased, with the exception of a few additions to the neighborhood made during each of the following decades on the few vacant lots that remained available.

Because approximately ninety percent of the residences in North Point North were built between 1900 and 1930, the district has a pleasing visual cohesiveness that is enhanced by the fact that nearly all the buildings are masonry. Most of the buildings are also compatible in style; at the same time there is a great deal of variety as a result of the eclecticism that permeated architectural design during the first quarter of the twentieth century. As the residences of North Point North illustrate, there was a widespread interest in historical styles, and particularly foreign styles, during the 1900's.

In a discussion of the great houses of Wisconsin Built during the decades before and after World War I, Richard Perrin notes:

The most preferred period styles in Wisconsin were Tudor English, Georgian and Colonial, Mediterranean, and French Provincial – in the order named.³

The overwhelming predominance of English Tudor and Georgian styled residences in North Point North bears out this statement.

The original residents of North Point North played an important role in the shaping of its architecture. Wealthy and well educated, many had traveled abroad and their taste reflected in this experience.

Having admired the monuments of the past and experienced the charm of English and Norman manor houses as well as the gaiety of Spanish and Italian villas, these traveled clients, when ordering a new work for themselves, wanted to live over again the pleasure they had experienced.⁴

Moreover, they chose capable architects to design their homes. Many prominent local architects of the period are represented in the district. The list includes: William D. Kimball, John A. Moller, Richard Phillip, Elmer Grey, Thomas Van Alyea, Henry C. Koch, Alexander C. Eschweiler, George B. Ferry and Alfred C. Clas, Charles D. Crane and

³ Richard W. E. Perrin, The Architecture of Wisconsin, Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969, p. 109.

⁴ Ibid., p. 107

Carl Barkhausen, Charles Kirchoff, Thomas L. Rose, Cornelius Leenhouts, Hugh W. Guthrie, Herman W. Buemming and Gustave A. Dick. The work of internationally renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright is also represented in the district by the Bogk residence at 2420 North Terrace Avenue.

The architect whose name appeared most frequently on the original building permits for North Point North residences was Alexander C. Eschweiler. A prolific designer, he planned numerous buildings in Wisconsin that have been recognized both locally and nationally. His many noteworthy accomplishments in Milwaukee include: the Charles Allis House (now the Charles Allis Art Museum), the Milwaukee-Downer College buildings (now part of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), the Wisconsin Telephone Company Building, the Milwaukee Gas Light Company Building, and the Clinton Street Filling Station (the prototype of the Wadhams Oil Company service station of the 1930's). These examples of his work indicate the designer's versatility, which is also apparent in the houses he planned for North Point North.

Among the prominent Milwaukeeans who settled in North Point North during the 1890's were: John F. Kern, who followed his father in operating the Eagle Flour Mill, which became one of the largest mills in the country; and Gustav J.A. Trostel, who joined his father and brother in operating a highly successful tanning and currier business in Milwaukee. Soon after the turn of the century, North Point North homes were built by many successful men including: A.F. Chapman, treasurer of the T.A. Chapman Company; A. Friedman, president of Edward Schuster & Company; Judge Lawrence W. Halsey, a leader in the Milwaukee Bar; Robert Nunemacher, whose family built the Nunemacher Opera House in Milwaukee; and, Charles B. Manville, vice-president of Johns-Manville, Inc. In the teens and twenties, other well-known Milwaukeeans moved into the neighborhood: Victor Brown, lawyer and lumberman; Caleb E. Johnson, first president of the Palmolive Company; Alexander C. Eschweiler and Alfred C. Clas, two of Milwaukee's most famous architects; Henry Harnishfeger, present of Harnishfeger Corporation, which manufactured cranes and excavating machinery; and A. Lester Slocum, first vice-president and treasurer of the Slocum Straw works. During its period of growth, North Point North was the home of numerous doctors and lawyers, as it is today.

North Point North continues to be one of the most prestigious residential neighborhoods in Milwaukee. Most of the buildings are maintained in excellent condition. However, for a number of years beginning in the 1940's, parts of the district faced an uncertain future. As the wealthiest families moved out of the district, frequent complaints of unlicensed boarding houses were filed with the Building Inspector's office. A relaxed attitude towards the subdividing of homes led to the multiple unit conversions of the largest mansions. In 1970, a home at 2585 North Terrace was demolished by developers who proposed to build a seven story apartment building. This provided the catalyst to unify the neighborhood, and the residents quickly mobilized to force a zoning change forbidding multiple-family dwellings and conversions. Since then, stability has been regained throughout the district and many houses have been re-converted to single-family use.

Lake Park was the result of city efforts to establish a park system. Before 1880, Milwaukee had no legal means to buy and set aside property for park use. As a result, the only public parks were small squares, triangles or plots of land donated to the city. After the passage of state legislation in 1880 which made it possible for the city to issue

bonds for the acquisition and improvement of park property, Milwaukee established a Board of park Commissioners with Christian Wahl as president to plan a park system for the growing community.

In 1890, the Board acquired 24 acres of the bluff overlooking Lake Michigan at North Point. With subsequent purchases, Lake Park was formed. In 1892, Frederick Law Olmsted and Company of Brookline, Massachusetts were hired to design the new park. The Olmsted firm was working on the site plan for the 1893 Columbia Exposition in Chicago at the time, and was willing to take the commission in nearby Milwaukee.

Olmsted is considered to be the father of landscape architecture as a profession in America. His innovative work in landscape design, dating from his collaboration with Calvert Vaux in the laying out of New York's Central Park in the 1850's until the end of the nineteenth century, earned him a national reputation that was approaching its peak when he undertook the Lake Park project.

The design of Lake Park, with its pathway system, curving drives, bridges, pavilions, groves and meadows is a significant example of romantic naturalism in landscape design. Much of Olmsted's plan has remained intact.

IX. Preservation Guidelines

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the North Point North Historic District. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Guidelines for Rehabilitation

The North Point North Historic District is important because of its concentration of well-designed residences exhibiting fine craftsmanship and materials. Throughout the district's history owners have maintained their properties in nearly original condition. This has resulted in a neighborhood of well-preserved period residences and cohesive streetscapes. These guidelines are based upon those contained in Section 2-335(10) of the historic preservation ordinance. These guidelines are not intended to restrict an owner's use of his/her property, but to serve as a guide for making changes that will be sensitive to the architectural integrity of the structure and appropriate to the overall character of the district.

1. Roofs

- a. Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they do not visually intrude upon those elevations visible from the public right-of-way. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, pitch or gable orientation.
- b. Retain the original roofing materials where ever possible. Avoid using new roofing materials that are inappropriate to the style and period of the building and neighborhood.
- c. Replace deteriorated roof coverings with new materials that match the old in size, shape, color and texture. Avoid replacing deteriorated roof covering with new materials that differ to such an extent from the old in size, shape, color and texture so that the appearance of the building is altered.

2. Exterior Finishes

a. Masonry

- (i) Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone and unpainted brick. This is likely to be historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- (ii) Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar

colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or not used when the building was constructed.

- (iii) Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or marble.
- (iv) Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial cast stone or fake brick veneer.

b. Stucco

Repair stucco with stucco mixture duplicating the original as closely as possible in appearance and texture.

c. Wood and Doors

- (i) Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features such as clapboards, shingles, cornices, brackets, half-timbering, window architraves and doorway pediments. These are in most cases an essential part of a building's character and appearance that should be retained.
- (ii) Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed such as artificial stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles, vinyl or aluminum siding.

3. Windows

- a. Retain existing window and door openings that are visible from the public right-of-way. Retain the original configurations of panes, sash, lintels, keystones, sills, architraves, pediments, hoods, doors, shutters and hardware. Avoid making additional openings or changes in the principal elevations by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door panes or sash. Avoid discarding original doors and door hardware when they can be repaired or reused.
- b. Respect the stylistic period or periods a building represents. If replacement of window sash or doors is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the

original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements such as unpainted galvanized aluminum storm and screen window combinations. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with materials like glass-block or the installation of plastic or metal strip awnings or fake shutters that are not in proportion to the openings or that are historically out of the character with the building. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

4. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation

- a. Retain porches and steps visible from the public right-of-way that are historically and architecturally appropriate to the building. Avoid altering porches and steps by enclosing open porches or replacing wooden steps with cast concrete steps or by removing original architecturally appropriate to the building. Avoid altering porches and steps by enclosing open porches or replacing wooden steps with cast concrete steps or by removing original architectural features, such as handrails, balusters, columns or brackets.
- b. Retain trim and decorative ornamentation including copper downspouts and guttering, copings, cornices, cresting, finials, railings, balconies, oriels, pilasters, columns, chimneys, bargeboards or decorative panels. Avoid the removal of trim and decorative ornamentation that is essential to the maintenance of the buildings historic character and appearance.
- c. Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using replacement materials that do not accurately reproduce the appearance of the original material.

5. Additions

Make additions that harmonize with the existing building architecturally and are located so as not visible from the public right-of-way, if at all possible. Avoid making additions that are unsympathetic to the original structure and visually intrude upon the principal elevations.

B Guidelines for Streetscapes

The streetscapes in North Point North are visually cohesive because of the intact building stock and the retention of period street and landscaping features. There are few non-contributing buildings or visually prominent inappropriate additions to historic structures. The traditional landscape treatment of the building lots and

the period streetlights contribute to the maintenance of the district's traditional residential character.

1. Maintain the height, scale, mass and materials established by the buildings in the district and the traditional setback and density of the block faces. Avoid introducing elements that are incompatible in terms of siting, materials, height or scale.
2. Use traditional landscaping, fencing, signage and street lighting that is compatible with the character and period of the district. Avoid introducing landscape features, fencing, street lighting or signage that are inappropriate to the character of the district.

C. Guidelines for New Construction

There has been very little new construction in North Point North. Only twelve buildings have been constructed since 1940. These were small apartment buildings, rowhouses or single-family residences. Only five original residences had to be demolished to accommodate these structures. It is important that additional new construction be designed so as to harmonize with the character of the district.

1. Siting

New construction must reflect the traditional siting of buildings in North Point North. This includes setback, spacing between buildings, the orientation of openings to the street and neighboring structures, and the relationship between the main building and accessory buildings.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk; the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof; and, individual building components such as porches, overhangs and fenestration must be compatible with the surrounding structures.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the surrounding buildings. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block must express the same continuity established by the historic structures.

4. Materials

The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials traditionally used in North Point North. The physical

composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

D. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable, if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission shall take the following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, into consideration when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive affect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

6. Replacement

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is to be replaced by a compatible building of similar age, architectural style and scale or by a new building that would fulfill the same aesthetic function in the area as did the old structure (see New Construction Guidelines).

E. Guidelines for Lake Park

Lake Park provides a link between the North Point North residential area and the lakefront. The Olmsted design blended the established street system with the park circulation system to unify the bordering neighborhood with the park.

Although the Olmsted plan was not fully executed, Lake Park still exhibits many features of the Olmsted scheme including the pathways and bridges, sculpture and plantings. As changes are planned, care should be taken not to obstruct major views and vistas and to maintain to the fullest extent possible those design features that remain from the Olmsted plan.

1. Roadways, Paths and Bridges

Every attempt should be made to maintain the historic vehicular and pedestrian circulation system in the park including drives, paths, stairways and bridges. New parking areas, roadways, paths or bridges should be designed so as to be compatible with the historic character of the park.

2. Plantings

As much of the mature landscaping in the park should be maintained as possible. New plant material should be sited within existing planting areas or in new areas compatible with the overall historic design of the park. The basic wooded and open area landscape scheme of the park should be maintained to as great an extent as possible.

3. Lighting

The traditional harp luminaries and globe lights found in the park should be retained. New lighting systems should be designed to be compatible with the traditional lighting systems. Consideration should be given to using reproduction period fixtures when new light standards are required.

4. Pavilions

The historic architectural appearance of the pavilions and accessory buildings in the park should be maintained. They should be treated as outlined in Section A, guide for Rehabilitation. New structures should be architectural expressions of their own time, but should be compatible in design with the historic character of their surroundings.

F. North Point Lighthouse

The North Point Lighthouse and Lighthouse Keepers residence are historic structures of architectural and engineering significance. The Lighthouse is a tapering, octagonal, steel and cast-iron structure. The Keeper' residence is a frame Queen Anne style dwelling.

1. Lighthouse

Every effort should be made to retain the historic exterior appearance of this structure including the steel plate cladding and fenestration.

2. Lighthouse Keeper's Residence

The exterior of the structure should be treated in accordance with IX.A Guidelines for Rehabilitation.