

1. INTRODUCTION

Plainfield's Historic Urbanized Core: An Intensive-Level Survey is the village's first intensive-level survey of the urbanized core. It follows the creation of the Historic Preservation Commission and historic preservation ordinance in 2004, and was conducted simultaneously with the Rural Structures and Farmsteads Survey of historic resources outside the village boundaries.

As stated in the Project Objectives, the village, through this project, was seeking:

- To provide information on every structure included within the survey area defined herein to identify and determine the eligibility of structures, in whole or part thereof, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as locally designated landmarks or historic district;
- To provide an inventory consisting of all properties in the defined survey area to consist of an inventory form, black and white photograph, description, construction date, physical changes, historical information, and a National Register evaluation of the properties;
- To provide information on local Plainfield architecture and on significant architectural styles, both commercial and domestic, in the historic core;
- To provide historical information on the development of the area; and
- To fulfill the survey and documentation standards and requirements of the Certified Local Government program.

All of these objectives were met through the requirements of the project.

More than ten years ago, in October 1994, the *Reconnaissance Survey Report: Historic/Architectural Resources* was completed. The report examined the architecture and history of the community, and provided approaches to conducting an intensive-level survey. Since that time, the only other survey to be conducted was the Appendix F: Historic Urban Building Inventory, April 2000 as part of the *Design Manual, Lockport Street Business Corridor*. The village has no additional listings in the National Register of Historic Places. In fact, one National Register listed building—Flanders House—has since been moved and is now eligible for removal from the National Register. Perhaps what is most astonishing about the period of time since the Reconnaissance Survey was completed is the growth and development in and around the village. Between 1990 and 2000, the village's population increased by 186%, from 4,557 to 13,038. In the 2002 special census, the population had increased to 21,000, then with the latest special census dated October 27, 2005, the population was 30,314.

During the time this project was conducted, the village designated its first local landmark—510 North Fox River Street. Most recently, the village passed a revised Demolition Ordinance. Importantly, this newest Demolition Ordinance provides a review opportunity to the Historic Preservation Commission before a demolition permit may be granted. This intensive-level survey provides valuable information to the village for making better informed decisions in this process. Additionally, with the recommendations in this survey, the Historic Preservation Commission and the village can work toward achieving designation goals and ultimately preservation of the village’s unique history that is represented through its historic resources. Important to note is that this survey is a process as much as a document. While over 700 survey forms and this report have been prepared, the forms, recommendations, and determinations of significance are not all-inclusive. Additional relevant information will continue to surface, and will continue to contribute to this base of documentation.

2. METHODOLOGY

As an intensive-level historic resources survey, this project is a building by building survey of an area specified by the Village of Plainfield, Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission. A survey form and photograph was produced for every historic building within the defined area, with additional photography of outbuildings associated with the main buildings on each property.

As established by the Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission, the boundaries of the survey area are generally the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad and the DuPage River (to the west); northeasterly to Mill Street, easterly to Eastern Avenue and the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad; southerly to Lake Renwick and the Plainfield Township Cemetery; and westerly along Fort Beggs Drive to the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad. The area was initially estimated by the Village of Plainfield to contain approximately 525 properties. This initial figure was underestimated by approximately 249 properties, representing a forty-seven percent increase. In an effort to reduce the overage, the consultant and village planning staff agreed that a general group form would be done for certain areas. These areas were strictly modern in development, and included no historic resources. They are Vintage Knoll Drive (twelve properties); Vista Lane (five properties); North Penn Road (nineteen properties); and Lakeside Drive (sixteen properties). This reduced the overage by approximately fifty-two properties. Nevertheless, the final count of survey forms was 722, nearly 200 properties above the original figure, thus impacting the original completion date of the project.

The survey area consists of the original thirteen blocks of the Village of Plainfield (1834), the Village of East Plainfield (1835), Arnold’s Addition (1845), as well as subsequent additions and subdivision platted through the 1940s.

At the August 25, 2005 meeting of the Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission, the goals for the project were further discussed with historic preservation consultant Alice Edwards Novak of ArchiSearch Historic Preservation Consultants. The discussion included:

- attaining a good understanding of the architectural context of the village;
- determining what is truly historic, with particular regard to evaluations for possible registration (National Register and local designations);
- using the individual survey forms as a *basis for discussion* as to why a particular property is or is not historic (The survey forms are not “end-all” documents, but rather may be added to as Historic Preservation Commissioners and individual property owners discover additional history pertaining to any property.);
- understanding building terminology;
- having the survey completed before the next building cycle; and
- considering other potential products such as tourism brochures, a building watch list, publications, financial incentives, and other planning programs.

At that time, the survey form was also discussed. Earlier in the summer during consultant interviews, the Historic Preservation Commission had expressed an interest in a more detailed method of architectural description, as Ms. Novak presented on the Quincy, Illinois form which she had developed. The narrative descriptions were to include number of stories, building shape or plan, foundation and wall materials, roof shape and material, porch, windows, decorative features, and other features for each main building. Ms. Novak outlined suggested changes to the form. The category “Condition” was recommended for removal by Ms. Novak, as it is a highly subjective determination and does not necessarily effect a property’s significance. The village requested that the Property Index Number, or PIN, be added to the form to assist with village records. Addresses along Division Street are being changed to a five digit system, but some properties still have the former four digit addresses posted. Since this process is ongoing, both addresses were requested on the survey forms for clarity.

The Historic Preservation Commission also requested that the date of field survey be included on the survey forms. As part of an effort to manage a large amount of data collected, a field log number or tag number was added by the consultant as an extension to the field survey date. This number is of no permanent use on the form; rather, it served as a means to check field forms with forms which had been transcribed on the computer. If a computer form needed to be checked, the field forms were organized by the field log number, rather than by address. The field log numbers generally reflect the order in which properties were surveyed.

All properties within the survey area were surveyed, regardless of estimated date of construction, with one exception. In an effort to reduce the overage of properties within the survey area, general or group forms were done for four modern developments; rather than individual forms on the fifty-two properties in those four areas, a single summary form was done for each street or development. Properties which were less than fifty years old were described in a shorter method, as these would be non-contributing properties in any potential historic district. Outbuildings were included where relevant, but were also documented in a shorter method. As a requirement of the village, both main buildings and any outbuildings were photographed for the survey forms.

Fieldwork was conducted by the surveyor walking each block, standing in the public right-of-way in front of each building, and taking notes on each property with a field form and clipboard. Outbuildings were documented to the best extent possible given typical limited views from the public right-of-way. On rare occasions, the survey was conducted from the car due to inclement weather conditions. Field work was conducted in August 2005 through mid-January 2006. Photography was conducted in January and February, with field days devoted solely to photography. This was done not only for efficiency, but also due to foliage throughout much of the fall, followed by holiday decorations. The winter photography allowed for the clearest views possible of each property. Before the photography field work was begun, two properties were demolished: the Herath-Quinn House at 14926 (formerly 802) North Division Street/State Route 59 and 15211 (formerly 403) North Division Street/State Route 59.

The report was compiled over much of the extent of the project time line, with sections submitted in December, March, and June. Opportunities for Historic Preservation Commission and staff comments were provided after the submission of each section, with comments incorporated into the revised report in June, and again at the submission of the final report the first week of November 2006.

Research focused on materials available through the Plainfield Historical Society Museum, the Illinois History Survey (at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), and on-line Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (available through the University of Illinois). Sanborn Maps dating to 1893, 1898, 1912, 1931, and 1944 were the chief source of building specific information. Local and county history publications were the main sources for the historic context development.

Overall, this intensive-level survey was more architectural in content and analysis, with very limited building specific historic research. Significance was most always based on architectural value through field observation, rather than association with significant persons or significant events in the village's history. Further archival research and oral histories may result in additional properties being determined as significant for local landmark and historic district designations.

A companion goal of this project was to make opportunities for public education throughout the survey process. On Tuesday, September 13, a public meeting was held at the Masonic Lodge to introduce the survey project. Representatives from the Masonic Lodge spoke about their historic headquarters. John Kersh, then a Planner for Village of Plainfield, gave the background on the project, and Ms. Novak from ArchiSearch Historic Preservation Consultants spoke about how the project was being conducted. The meeting was publicized through regular village postings, the Plainfield Historical Society, and local media, and was attended by a variety of Historic Preservation Commissioners, property owners, and other interested people.

As part of the education process, a survey handout was developed by ArchiSearch. The one-page flyer used a question and answer format addressing common questions and concerns from survey field work. Questions included, "Why is this person staring at my house?," "Why do we need this

survey?,” and “Will my taxes be affected by the information gathered on the survey form?” The handout was given to people who inquired to the field surveyors about the project. The handout included the Planner’s name and number at the Village Hall, to provide the opportunity for additional questions and to legitimize the surveyors in the field. It is included as an Appendix in this report.

Another handout, “This Old Building,” was developed to encourage property owners and other knowledgeable people to contribute building specific information about properties in the urbanized core. This handout was available at the September public meeting and through local businesses, as distributed by John Kersh, who was a Planner for the village at the time. It is also included as an Appendix in this report.

As would be required with a Certified Local Government project, this project included monthly updates from the consultant to the village, focusing on field work progress, any problems with the project, and any emerging themes related to the architecture of the village. In the middle of the project, John Kersh, Planner, left employment with the village and the project was then overseen by Michael Garrigan, Village Planner, then Kelley Chrissie, Planner, as of March 2006.

3. PREVIOUS SURVEYS AND OTHER PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION

Likely the earliest documentation of a building in Plainfield was the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Dennison Green House, 222 Main Street. The HABS program was begun in 1934, providing photographs (medium and large format, black and white, archivally stable photographs), measured drawings, and/or history documentation of select properties throughout the country; the program is still active, but unfortunately in modern times, HABS documentation is usually conducted in anticipation of a building’s demolition. The materials produced on the Dennison Green House were completed in 1935, a very early date for documentation. The photographs of the house show it in absolutely pristine condition with a high degree of integrity, prior to the application of asbestos shingle siding.¹

The two earliest true surveys which included the Village of Plainfield were companion surveys as part of a statewide, county by county effort which was initiated after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Act established state historic preservation offices and the National Register of Historic Places, and the surveys were part of the first state efforts in historic preservation. Initially under the auspices of the Illinois Department of Conservation, the state historic preservation office conducted initial surveys as the Illinois Historical Landmarks Survey (completed in 1974 for Will County) and the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (completed in 1972 for Will County), both as part of the Division of the Illinois Historic Sites Survey. The crews of field surveyors at that time varied greatly in terms of the number of people surveying and the thoroughness of the survey. Generally, few properties were identified in any of these surveys. Additionally, attitudes toward historic and architectural significance have changed drastically since that time period as well. At best, the early state surveys are useful to confirm particular significance for an elite and very limited

group of properties. The information provided in these surveys is typically no more than a property name, address, an estimated date, and perhaps a few words on significance.

The “Inventory of Historic Landmarks in Will County,” oriented more toward historic significance, included five Plainfield properties:

Octagonal House, Illinois Route 26 and Van Dyke Road, ?date, “possibly a replica” [destroyed in the 1990 tornado];

Plainfield House [Halfway House], 503 Main Street, 1834, “Stage inn on Chicago-Ottawa Road. Also post office. Historical marker;”

Huling House, 33 Lockport Street, 1844, “Underground railroad station. Still has hiding closet intact;”

United Methodist Church, Chicago & Illinois streets, 1866, “Large, early stone church;” and

Plainfield Cemetery, Illinois Route 59, south side of town, est. 1840s, “Pioneer cemetery; has first minister in the region, and first settler.

The “Inventory of Historic Structures in Will County” was more architectural in emphasis. It included only one building in Plainfield, the Plymouth Congregational Church at the northeast corner of Lockport and Illinois streets.

As part of a summer internship program in 1980 with the Village of Plainfield, Michael A. Lambert, then a student in Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, conducted a survey. Mr. Lambert personally distributed survey forms to over two hundred property owners. Those survey forms sought information from property owners about their buildings, in addition to seeking feedback on community interest in historic preservation. Impressively, 107 surveys were returned as part of that project, and a good initial effort to begin an inventory of building specific information was thus begun.

In October 1994, the “Reconnaissance Survey Report, Historic/Architectural Resources,” was completed and presented to the Village Board by The URBANA Group, a consulting firm based in Urbana, Illinois. The reconnaissance survey, sometimes referred to as “windshield survey,” included a summary of historic contexts, a summary of architectural styles and vernacular building types, recommendations for intensive-level survey, a discussion of preservation programs, and recommendations for National Register and potential local designations. The forty-seven page report recommended various sections, somewhat based on village plats and additions, for survey, including priorities. Also noted were areas of more modern construction which were recommended to be eliminated from survey. Since that time, more than ten years ago, some of these properties have

since gained possible historic significance, as generally historic preservation programs such as the National Register of Historic Places consider properties which are fifty years old or older to be potentially historic.

In 2000, Arris Architects + Planners in Plainfield, created the *Design Manual for the Lockport Street Business Corridor*, April 2000, in conjunction with updating the Master Plan. Michael A. Lambert was the principal author. The *Manual* included Appendix F: Historic Urban Core Building Inventory, a listing of buildings in the corridor with building address, a brief statement of significance, a numerical integrity evaluation, basic description details (number of stories, original materials, additions, construction date), preservation value, and other recognitions of the buildings such as the earlier Reconnaissance Survey, the state surveys, and the National Register.

The National Register of Historic Places nominations also provide excellent historic and architectural information about the village. Plainfield continues to have only three properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places and one of these, the Flanders House, will be de-listed due to an unapproved move. The two other listings are Plainfield Halfway House, 503 West Main Street (listed September 29, 1980 for historic significance) and the Standard Oil Gasoline Station, 600 West Lockport (listed November 13, 1984 for historic and architectural significance). Flanders House, originally located at 405 West Main Street (listed November 14, 1991 for architectural and historic significance), was moved two blocks west to 507 Main Street, but the move was not considered before the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council, thereby making the building eligible for de-listing.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY AREA

The survey area boundaries generally included all potentially historic construction within the village boundaries; the area within the village boundaries which was not included in the survey was excluded because it was modern in construction. To the north, the survey boundary extended on Division to the north side of Plainfield-Naperville Road. The boundary followed the DuPage River along the rear property lines of buildings facing Main Street, west to Lockport Street/Route 126. Here the boundary extended west to include the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company Freight Depot and Passenger Station, just west of the bridge over the DuPage River. Continuing west, the survey area boundary follows the DuPage River, along Electric Park, Vista Lane, and the rear property lines of buildings facing James until construction ends along the east river bank, four lots south of the intersection of James Street with Fort Beggs Drive. The southern boundary of the survey area extends down the middle of Fort Beggs Drive to Division/Route 59, where it jogs north around the cemetery, then continues east along the cemetery's northern boundary. The boundary continues southeasterly across Joliet Road/U.S. Route 30, then follows the western boundary of Lake Renwick to the eastern ends of Ottawa, Chicago, and Lockport, where the railroad marks the end of historic construction within the village. The boundary follows the railroad northwesterly until Eastern Avenue, where it goes north. Along Eastern Avenue, the boundary jogs east twice: once for the Vintage Knoll development which is framed by two historic buildings, and again for three lots

just south of Main Street/Illinois Route 126, where historic buildings remain; by jogging to include these two areas, the boundary has excluded the modern school between these. The boundary goes southwesterly along the southeastern side of Main Street, then jogs across to the northwest to include two lots along the north side of the street at Mill Street. The boundary follows the end of College Street, then goes across Plainfield-Naperville Road to include four lots before going to the point of origin.

After the survey was begun, several areas within the survey boundary were eliminated from intensive-level survey due to construction which was completely modern. These areas included Lakeside Drive, off the eastern section of Ottawa; Penn Road, just north off Main Street; Vintage Knoll Drive; Vista Lane, which faces Electric Park. None of these streets or developments is of sufficient age or exceptional architectural significance to be considered contributing to any potential historic district. Furthermore, these areas were eliminated to reduce the number of properties to be surveyed, which exceeded the original estimate by nearly 200.