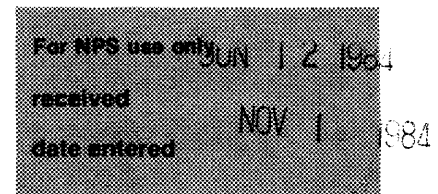


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Columbia Avenue Historic District

Description

The Columbia Avenue Historic District is located off Harrison street, one block northwest of the Vander Veer Park Historic District. It is composed of 19 four- to six-unit apartment buildings built between 1930 and 1939, two similar structures from the 1950's, and a modern ranch house which is the only intrusive feature. The "stem" of the district is Columbia Avenue between Harrison and Ripley, containing eight of the buildings. The remaining structures are located north and south of Columbia on Ripley and Harrison, and on Hayes Street one block north of Columbia. Each building has its own garage, located directly to the rear and accessible via alleys which bisect each block. The area is immaculately kept, with low ornamental shrubbery, foundation plantings, and occasional shade trees.

What appears at first glance to be a collection of largely identical structures is revealed upon closer examination to be a subtle exercise in theme and variation. In this regard, all the buildings of the district contribute equally to its importance.

The buildings of the Columbia Avenue district share a set of characteristics:

- two stories, with basement-level unit
- strictly rectangular plan
- frame construction, with veneer of polychrome tapestry brick
- symmetrical three- or five- part main facade
- emphasis on the main entrance as a decorative element
- restrained use of decorative detail
- multi-car garage unit behind each building, in matching brick

Within this basic framework, however, each building in the district expresses its own individual character, so that while there is a superficial resemblance, no two are exactly alike. Several buildings have flat, parapetted roofs and a slightly recessed central entrance bay, while others have hipped roofs and flat facades, or projecting central bays culminating in shallow gables with partial returns. Entrances are variously rectangular, round-arched, or have depressed Tudor arches. They may be edged with brick, rockfaced stone, or glazed terracotta. Facades may be divided into three or five bays, with metal casement or wood sash windows, the latter occurring singly or in pairs. Several of the later buildings have end-bay windows that extend to the outer edges of the wall, thus opening up the solidity of the rectangular block. There are random

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instances of leaded, stained glass, and also bits of mirror glass, often employed in abstract designs in stairwell windows. Several buildings feature glazed terracotta in an overtly "medieval" theme, as label moldings, modified Gibbs surrounds, copings on crenellated parapets, or as purely decorative tiles featuring lion heads, fleurs-de-lis, or armored knights. While these motifs occur repeatedly, they are used differently on each building. The same holds true for the basic exterior cladding, a polychrome tapestry brick, which appears in various color combinations such as red and green, or brown, green and tan, and is carried through to the garage of each building, even to careful selection of mortar color (tan or red).

The years between construction of the first and last buildings in the complex are revealed primarily in lack of terracotta ornament and introduction of a projecting, gabled entrance bay in the later structures. The buildings which deviate most from the overall design themes of the district are actually its pivotal points, located at the western end of the Columbia Avenue "stem". These two buildings, built in 1931, are the largest in the district, their five-part facades given additional length through full-height, polygonal window bays flanking the central, round-arched entrance.

Significance:

The Columbia Avenue district is significant as possibly the earliest example of apartment complex construction in Davenport, in which a number of multiple-unit buildings were constructed to a common design theme. Although nationally the apartment complex has achieved a certain notoriety in recent decades, due to its ubiquity, often poor construction and frequently excrable design, it has become a major form of housing in late 20th century America. The significance of the Columbia Avenue district lies both in its fidelity to the basic characteristics of apartment complex planning, and, equally important, in the quality of its design and execution. The basic architectural theme of the district is clearly stated by form and selection of materials, which unite all members of the district and at the same time set it apart from the surrounding areas of single-family frame housing. Within the district, however, each building displays its own "personality," achieved through variation in fenestration, roof shape, and decorative detail.

The Columbia Avenue district is the only apartment complex recorded in the Davenport architectural survey, and may be the earliest example of its kind in the city. Multiple-family housing, however, has a long tradition in Davenport, with at least one rowhouse remaining from the 1860's, some 30 years after the city was founded. Throughout most of the 19th century, a

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more popular form of multiple housing was the double house, or duplex, usually built in whichever styles were popular for single-family dwellings at the time, and distinguished from the latter chiefly by mirror-image facades. Around the turn of the century, apartment buildings appeared in Davenport, many designed by local architects. These three-to-five-story, masonry-clad structures, usually employing Federal or other neoclassical themes, were built near the central city, frequently along streetcar lines, and were inhabited by a middle and upper-middle class clientele that enjoyed relative proximity to downtown offices, stores and cultural amenities.

From around World War I through the 1920's, however, most residential construction in the city focused on single family housing. Between 1925 and 1930, an area just northwest of Vander Veer Park was host to two new developments in local multifamily housing. Harrison Manor (HA-2502), a 46-unit apartment building, larger than any other such structure then built in Davenport, was built in 1925-26. A distinctly urban structure, Harrison Manor resembled, in its size, neo-Gothic style and deep courtyards, apartment buildings which were appearing in the Chicago area at about the same time. The second development was located on Columbia Avenue, about one block north and west of Harrison Manor. This apartment complex was begun in 1930 by McInnes Brothers, a Davenport contractor/developer. The following year however, the firm went bankrupt, and several buildings then under construction were completed by Otto Behrens and John F. Steffen, both local contractors. Around 1937, Archie McInnes reorganized the original McInnes Bros. firm, and returned to Columbia Avenue, where he completed five more buildings in the complex, all considered "non-contributing" due to their age of less than 50 years.

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Columbia Avenue Historic District

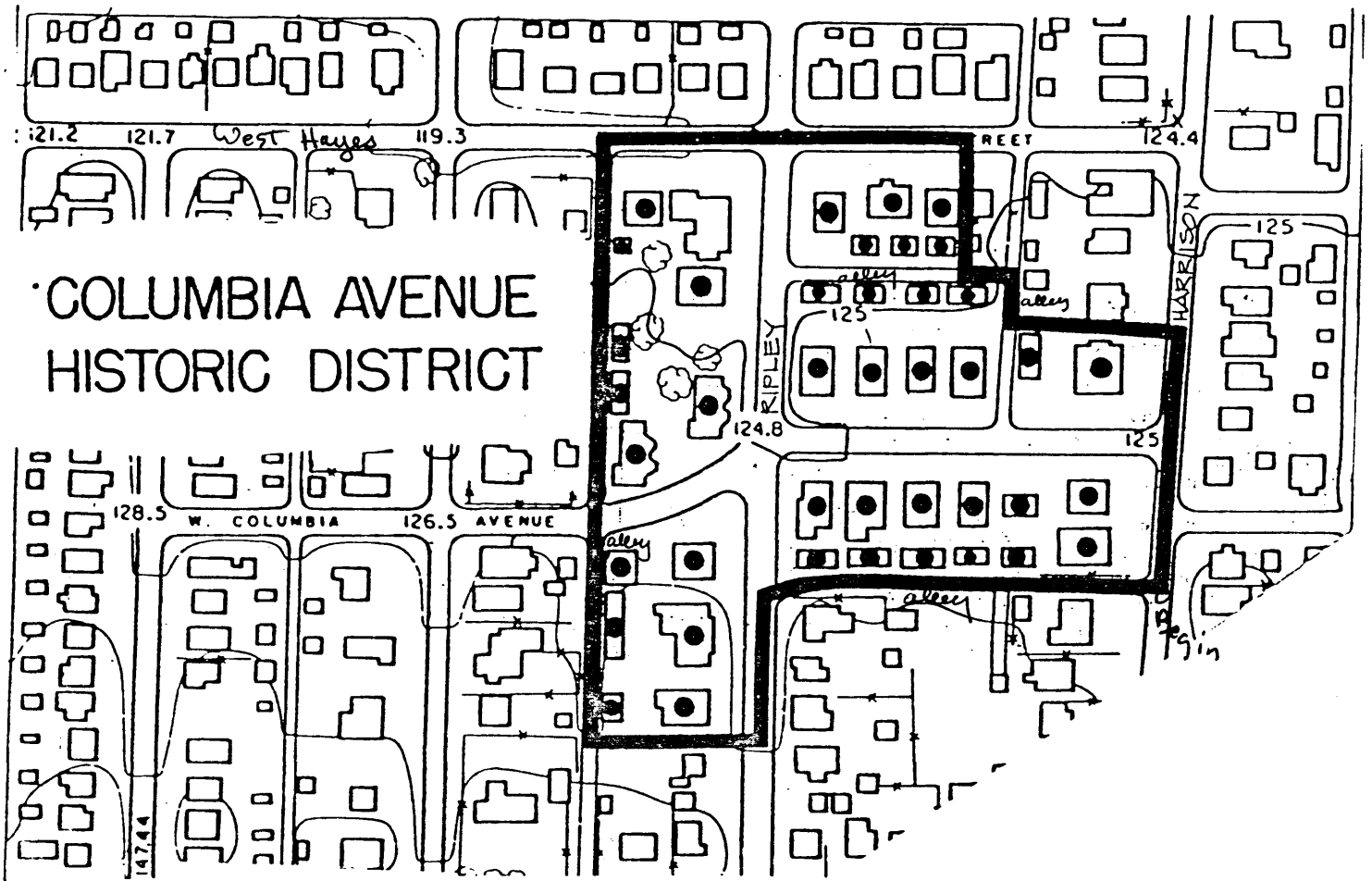
Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at southeast corner of property at 2640 Harrison; then west along alley behind 400-block of W. Columbia to Ripley; then south on Ripley to the southeast corner of property at 2620 Ripley; then west along south property line to alley; then north along alley, crossing Columbia Ave., to W. Hayes; then east along W. Hayes to northeast corner of property at 323 W. Hayes; then south to alley; east along alley to another alley intersecting at right angles; south along this alley to northwest corner of property at 2650 Harrison; east along property line to Harrison Street; south on Harrison Street to beginning.

UTM References:

- A 15/702120 4602130
- B 15/702115 4602020
- C 15/701980 4602000
- D 15/701940 4602000
- E 15/701940 4602180
- F 15/702060 4602180

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KEY

- INDIVIDUALLY SIGNIFICANT AND/OR PIVOTAL STRUCTURE
- ◻● STRUCTURE CONTRIBUTING TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN HISTORIC DISTRICT
- ◻ NEUTRAL OR INTRUSIVE STRUCTURE
- BOUNDARY OF AREA SURVEYED
- DISTRICT BOUNDARIES