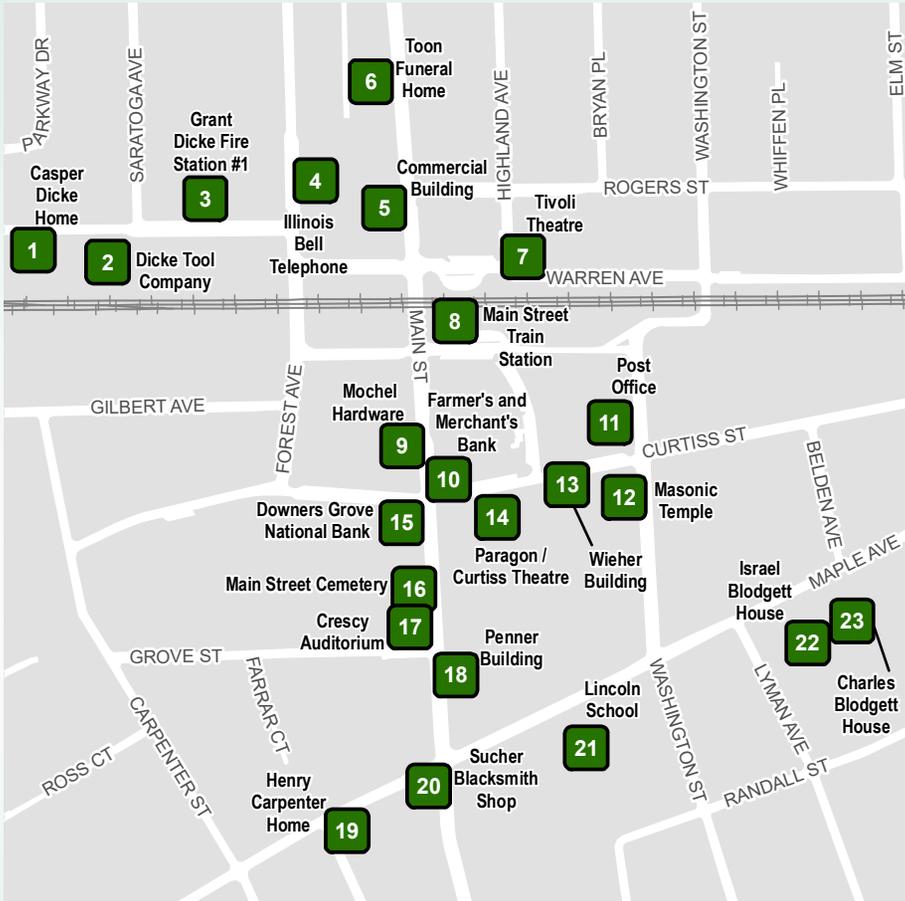


DOWNTOWN TOUR SITES



The Historic Downtown Walking Tour was a collaboration of the Village of Downers Grove, the Downers Grove Museum staff, and volunteers from the Downers Grove Historical Society. The Museum and Historical Society provided a majority of the historical photos, with contributions from local property owners.

The Village encourages you to reach out to the Museum and Historical Society to explore their archives and holdings, their collective knowledge, and their upcoming events.



the Downers Grove
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Village of
DOWNERS GROVE
FOUNDED IN 1832



DGM
DOWNERS
GROVE
MUSEUM

RESOURCES:

For more information about:

Landmarking your property, or about historic preservation in general in Downers Grove, visit:

<http://www.downers.us/govt/historic-preservation>

The Downers Grove Museum, upcoming events, private parties, and museum hours, visit:

<http://www.dgparks.org/places-to-go/the-museum>

The Downers Grove Historical Society, the Main Street Cemetery, Heritage Sites and the Historic Home Program, visit:

<http://downersgrovehistory.org/>

Lace up your sneakers, and enjoy exploring historic downtown Downers Grove! This brochure is intended to provide some brief insight into the rich history of the downtown, the architecture, and the people who were instrumental in fostering the community we have all come to cherish.

1 1219 WARREN AVENUE CASPER DICKE HOUSE 1890s

This Queen Anne residence was the family home of Casper Dicke, a German immigrant who founded the Dicke Tool Company (now Dicke Safety Products) in Chicago in 1886. He moved the business to Downers Grove in 1889. Casper's son, Elmer, recalled that his father expanded the home to accommodate his family, which grew to include seven sons and a daughter, by adding onto the front.



The Dicke House features a lively, asymmetrical composition, which is a hallmark of the Queen Anne style, and a variety of architectural elements, including a turret, prominent bay window, and a wrap-around porch.

In addition to Dicke Tool Company, the Dicke family owned Dicke Motors, which was next to Fire Station #1, and built and ran the Motiograph Family Theatre on the northwest corner of Warren and Forest Avenues (later moved to the first floor and known as the Don Theatre), where ten cents bought a brass ticket to the upstairs movie theater.



2 1201 WARREN AVENUE DICKE TOOL COMPANY BUILDING 1920s

This building was built in the 1920s on the site of the original Dicke Tool Company building that burned down in 1906. At the time of the conflagration, the fire department's horse team was preoccupied with a sewer construction project and was unable to make it to the factory. The new building is an excellent example of 1920s factory construction, featuring groups of large double-hung windows under masonry arches and fireproof common-bond, brick construction.



Dicke Safety Products is still family owned and operated and continues to design and produce a variety of safety and tool products for customers all over the world.

3 1120 WARREN AVENUE GRANT DICKE FIRE STATION #1 1927

This handsome, Colonial Revival fire station was constructed in 1927 and features several elements typical of the style, such as red brick in a Flemish bond, splayed lintels with prominent limestone keystones, a triangular pediment with a limestone roundel, and brick corner quoins.

The Downers Grove Fire Department was organized in May 1898. This was the first fire station in Downers Grove and was renamed in honor of Grant E. Dicke, one of Casper Dicke's seven sons, all of whom served as voluntary firemen at the station. It operated as a firehouse between 1928 and 1975, before becoming the centerpiece of the Oak Tree Towers senior independent-living complex in 1977.



4

4949 FOREST AVENUE ILLINOIS BELL TELEPHONE BUILDING 1929

The Illinois Bell Telephone building is an example of Art Deco, a rare style in Downers Grove. As the telephone system grew in the early 20th



century, vast amounts of square footage were needed to accommodate the large electro-mechanical switchboards and equipment that allowed the network to function. Buildings like this, and the later telephone facility across the street, housed not only equipment but also the teams of operators required to run it. It is particularly appropriate that Art Deco was chosen for this seat of high technology in Downers Grove, because the style wonderfully encapsulates the exuberance and progressivism of the Jazz Age. This building, though only three stories high, features ornamental setbacks on its vertical piers and parapet that evoke the setbacks of soaring skyscrapers that defined America's cityscapes in the 1920s and captured the world's attention.

5

4958 MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL BUILDING C. 1929

The English Country Revival style was one of a handful of revivals that gained popularity for middle and upper-middle class residences in the 1920s. As suburbs developed in the early 20th century, English Country Revival was thought to be particularly appropriate, as it suggested charm, permanence, and legitimacy. Occasionally, the style was used in commercial structures in the downtowns of those suburbs and inner-ring communities. This building is an excellent representative of the style, with its front-facing gable and ornamental half-timbering, tall side parapet walls, wood brackets below its slightly cantilevered center bay, and scalloped vergeboard in the eaves. Not even the loss of its original storefront nor its 6-over-1 double hung windows can dampen this style's presence on Main Street.



6

4920 MAIN STREET TOON FUNERAL HOME 1890s AND 1929

The Toon Funeral Home was founded in 1929 by Ina and Dewey Toon. The building was totally redesigned that same year, converting a two-and-a-half-story doctor's home and office in a Queen Anne Style to a Classical Revival Style commercial building. The building no longer reveals any semblance to its Queen Anne origins, instead offering an excellent example of a Classical Revival building. Classical Revival was inspired by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which renewed interest in the Classical forms. This style also relies on earlier Greek Revival details including massive columns with capitals, topped by a pediment.



Toon Funeral Home utilizes common elements of Classical Revival, most notably for this building, the full height columned porch with a front facing pediment. Another stylistic feature is the entablature with dentil cornices. The arrangement of windows and doors is symmetrical and formal, with the front door flanked by pilasters, capped with a five-light transom and flat entablature. The walls are constructed of brick and stucco. Three major additions have been added since the 1929 conversion.

The business continues to operate as a family owned enterprise and will be entering their 89th year.



7 5021 HIGHLAND AVENUE
TIVOLI THEATRE 1928

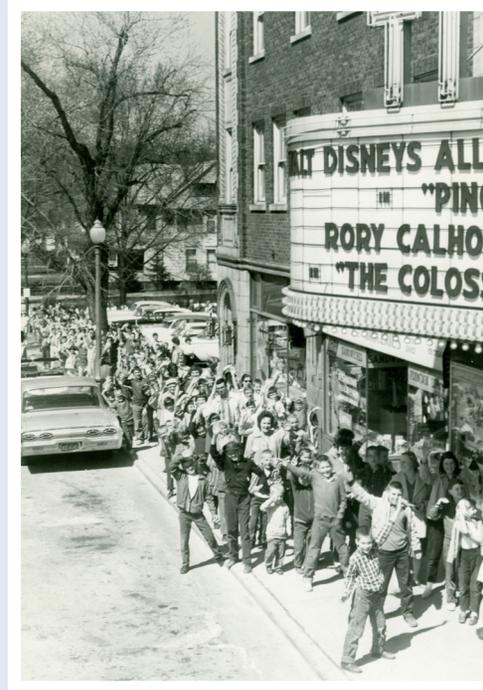
At its completion in 1928, the Tivoli completely out-classed the other theaters in Downers Grove. The theater's grand, Spanish Baroque Revival entrance is in cream-glazed terra cotta, perhaps the best example of this material in Downers Grove. On opening day, December 25, 1928, four-thousand people waited outside to attend its premiere performance at a cost of 15 cents for children and 40 cents for adults. Though constructed to show talking pictures, the Tivoli was equipped with a Wurlitzer organ for silent films, whose popularity was waning. A typical showing included a feature-length talking picture, three Vitaphone talking and singing acts, and a Movietone news reel.



Over the years, the Tivoli has been renovated, modernized, and restored. The original hotel elevator (Elevator #1 in Downers Grove) is still in daily use. The Tivoli's original Wurlitzer organ was repossessed towards the beginning of the Depression. In 1953, a modernization campaign replaced the original marquee with a modernistic, asymmetrical composition ablaze with neon and fluorescent light and installed new, wider seats that reduced seating capacity from 1,392 to its current 1,012. Classic Cinemas



Gustav Bunge and his son, George, commissioned the Chicago architectural firm of Van Gunten and Van Gunten to design a mixed use complex that included a theater, bowling alley, hotel, and retail spaces. Gustav relocated his Queen Anne home (now a Downers Grove Landmark) to make room for the massive undertaking.



has owned the Tivoli since 1978 and has expertly stewarded it through several improvements. In 1991, four of the original dressing rooms beneath the stage area were restored. In 1992, the Chicago Area Theatre Organ Enthusiasts (CATOE) installed a 1924, three-manual, ten-rank Wurlitzer organ relocated from the Indiana Theatre in East Chicago, Indiana. In 1996, Classic Cinemas had the auditorium and lobby interiors repainted in shades of red, blue, cream, and metallic gold to highlight their French Renaissance Revival ornament.



1000 BURLINGTON AVENUE

MAIN STREET TRAIN STATION 1911



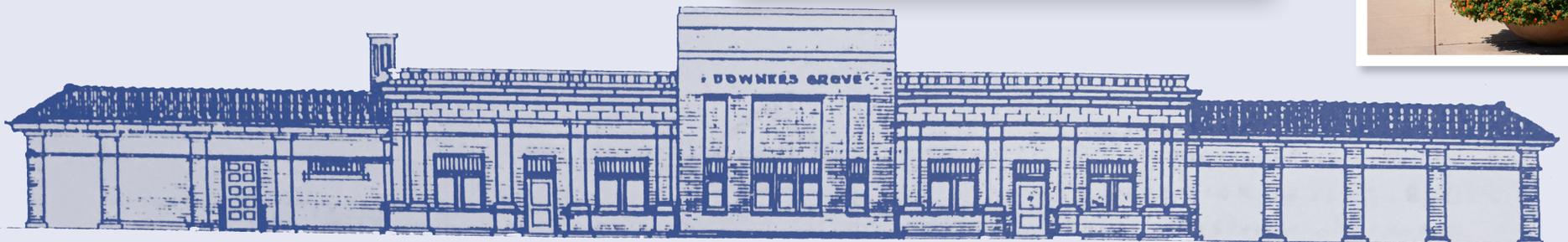
The Main Street Train Station was constructed in 1911 in the Classical Revival Style, which was a common stylistic choice for important public and institutional buildings because of its formality and grandeur. The brick station had a central entrance pavilion emblazoned with "Downers Grove" in a terra-cotta cartouche. The pavilion and wings were

wrapped with a Classical balustrade that sat above Doric pilasters. The roof is tiled at the pavilions with a flat-roof for the main building and terra cotta banding on the southern façade.

On April 3, 1947, the Twin-City Zephyr, traveling at 70 miles per hour, collided with a 14-ton tractor that had fallen onto the tracks in front of the station from a freight train moments before. The Zephyr's diesel engine burst into flames, and the first two coaches jackknifed, crashing into the station's north facade. Sixty-five passengers were injured, and three were killed. The Tivoli Theatre served as a triage center, the Masonic Temple hosted temporary housing, and the American Legion provided food. The north elevation's central pavilion was rebuilt and slightly simplified (see the 1948 architectural drawing below).



Downers Grove's first train station was located at the northwest corner of current day Main Street and Burlington Avenue. The station's completion in 1864 led Samuel Curtiss to establish the first subdivision in what is now the business district. When the current Main Street Station was completed in 1911, the 1864 station (visible on the right side of the upper left photo) was used for baggage and freight. It was razed in 1948 when the Main Street Station was repaired and replaced with parking spaces.



9 5122 MAIN STREET
MOCHEL HARDWARE 1884

Levi Mertz and Charles Mochel constructed the original building at 36 S Main (later renumbered 5122 Main Street), where the two partners opened their business, Mertz & Mochel, on June 25, 1884. The brick building consisted of a basement and two stories, utilizing wood columns, beams and floors, and was bordered by alleys on the south and west. Electricity was added in 1900.



In 1922, Mertz sold his interest to Charles Mochel, who formed a partnership with his son, John Mochel, Sr. The business was renamed Charles Mochel & Son. Also in 1922, by closing the alley to the south, the Mochels expanded the building for the first time. Next came the 1932 exterior alterations that changed the store to what is seen today. An ambitious 1955 rear addition doubled the building in size, extending the main and second floors above the newly excavated basement addition, all reaching the west alley.



Mochel's closed in 1995, ending 111 years of serving residents of Downers Grove and neighboring towns.



10 5135 MAIN STREET
FARMER'S AND MERCHANT'S BANK 1892

The Farmer's and Merchant's Bank Building was built in 1892 as the home of Downers Grove's first bank, which was organized on May 10, 1892. Prominent local contractor William James Herring constructed the building using an amalgam of popular architectural styles. The quarry-faced base and fully round arch of local limestone suggest Richardsonian Romanesque, while the pressed metal turret on the corner has ornament and a dome profile that evoke the Renaissance Revival. Banks and other prominent buildings often chose corner locations in the last quarter of the 19th century because they afforded a prominent position in the downtown streetscape. Here, as was frequently the case, the main business entrance was at the very corner in a chamfer and topped by a projecting turret that cantilevered from the front and side facades to increase its visibility far down Main Street.



Seemingly as proof of the building's visual and functional prominence, the bank donated a room in their new home to the newly formed Ladies Library Association to function as Downers Grove's first public library. For a few years in the early 1890s the Post Office was located in an office at the building's east end. In 1895, the building housed the Reporter Columbian Magazine, whose sign is visible in the second-floor window in the photo at the lower right.

In 1944, the building was considerably remodeled. In an effort to give the building a more up-to-date appearance, the turret was removed, the windows were truncated, and the face brick of the bank and that of its neighbor to the north were coated with a layer of cement that was colored and tooled to resemble squared-ashlar stone. The bank's original rough-hewn limestone base and arch are still visible.



11 **920 CURTISS STREET**
DOWNERS GROVE POST OFFICE 1937

The Downers Grove Post Office was constructed in 1937 to designs that came from the Department of the Treasury, Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect. It is typical of a kind of post office built during the Works Progress Administration, part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Part Art Moderne and part Classical Revival, the Downers Grove Post Office is austere and elegant, evoking both progressivism and tradition. Built of blond brick and cream terra cotta on a local limestone base,



the symmetrical building is raised up on a small plinth to increase its civic presence. The focal point of the interior is an oil-on-canvas mural entitled "Chicago, Railroad Center of the Nation" by Elizabeth Tracy (1911-1992), commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts in the Department of the Treasury. Installed in 1940, the 6-foot-by-13-foot painting depicts workers in a rail yard with a cart of US mail as the centerpiece. Born in Boston, MA, Tracy was a Fine Arts graduate of Radcliffe College and completed several murals during the New Deal.



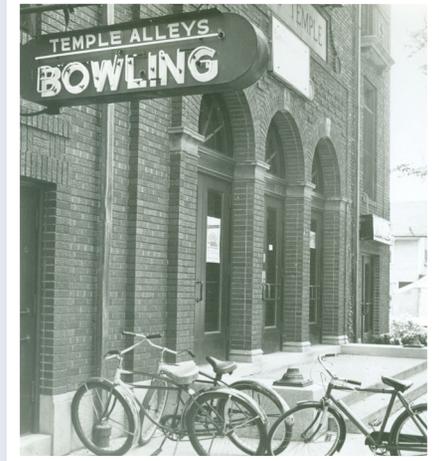
On September 11, 1838, Eli Curtiss was named Downers Grove's first Postmaster, which required him to ride horseback to Plainfield Road to meet the stagecoach that carried the mail. In September of 1843, Henry Carpenter succeeded Curtiss as Postmaster; he established the Post Office in his home and general store on Maple Avenue and Lane Place.

After several more moves, including a stint in the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank (see #10), a small building was erected expressly as the Post Office immediately across Curtiss Street from the bank. This building served as the Post Office until 1937 when the present building was constructed.



12 **923 CURTISS STREET**
MASONIC TEMPLE GROVE LODGE 1924-25

Prominent Chicago architects Fugard & Knapp designed this handsome building in 1924 for Grove Lodge N. 824, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. It is a creative combination of two English revival styles – Georgian and English Country. The brick body of the building is Georgian, with round arches, pronounced, limestone keystones and impost blocks, while the top floor is English Country, with decorative heavy timber and stucco and ornamental "crucks", which are curved timbers that support, or in this case appear to support, a roof. Most of the building's masonry is laid in English bond, a nod to the country of origin of the Georgian Revival style, but the entrance features decorative brickwork (volute, a basket-weave course, diaper patterns) whose elaboration suggests Freemasonry itself.



The cornerstone was laid on July 12, 1924. Grove Lodge held their first meeting in their new temple on February 16, 1925. A celebratory ball was held in the upstairs ballroom as part of the grand opening. During the Great Depression the building served as the registration center for the national Re-Employment Service to register men for New Deal government work. The Lodge almost lost their building in the economic crisis, but in 1937 Lodge Master Charles K. McCann bought it for taxes and sold it back to the Lodge for \$1.00. During WWII the building was used as a Civil Defense Shelter and military motor pool-training center. It also served as a temporary hospital during the 1947 Zephyr train crash.



13

933-937 CURTISS STREET WIEHER BUILDING 1927



This two-story commercial building, completed in 1927, is a fascinating example of Spanish Baroque Revival. The wings are of smooth-faced limestone, topped with a modillioned cornice and a decorative roof of terra cotta tiles. The center pavilion

is an explosion of Baroque details in carved limestone. In the parapet is a garland of ribbons and flowers from which hang two roundels, each with a grotesque (face), a common decorative element in Baroque architecture. The focal point of the main façade is a group of four windows, framed

by engaged Ionic columns, and centered around a niche topped with a scallop shell and containing a cenotaph. The building opened as the Palace Meat Market. In 1935, the building was used by Dernbach Chevrolet, and later in 1937, Chuck Rumpf opened a meat market. The Wiehers purchased the business in 1948, running the family business until 2007.



14

1007 CURTISS STREET PARAGON / CURTISS THEATRE 1915



The Paragon Theater was built by local contractors to be “fireproof” with the “interior finishing... worthy of a city” according to the November 19, 1915 edition of the Downers Grove Reporter. It was a “cozy little playhouse, and not so small either, when one considers that the seating capacity is 484.”

By 1919, the theater was known as the Curtiss Theatre. Although for an interim stretch it was used as an undertakers and by West Suburban Motor Company, the theater reopened in 1927. In July 1928, it held a meeting that introduced Downers Grove to the upcoming Century of Progress Exposition of 1933. According to the July 29, 1928 edition of the Downers Grove Reporter, attendees enjoyed (at no fee) “speakers from Chicago, several from Downers Grove, a band and movies.”

The building has since undergone major exterior renovations, namely the addition of decorative asphalt canopies that obscure much of the original brick and transoms.



15

5140 MAIN STREET DOWNERS GROVE NATIONAL BANK 1970



The Downers Grove National Bank commissioned this glassy pavilion of a building in 1970. The concrete “waffle slab” roof, which is both decorative and structural, is strongly expressed at the perimeters and corners. It is held aloft by concrete piers, now covered in artificial stone, and effortlessly floats above the fully glazed exterior walls. This building is not only an excellent example of Modernist architecture, it also is a very good representative of how the banking industry reinvested in historic downtowns at a time when most were in decline due to concurrent suburbanization and urban decentralization. Banks, especially independent institutions, tended to build themselves relatively expensive new headquarters in the postwar period, both to proclaim their prominence in the community and, through the use of architectural Modernism, to portray their operations as advanced, progressive, and transparent.



16

5158 MAIN STREET MAIN STREET CEMETERY C. 1856



Located on the west side of Main Street, the half-acre park-like Main Street Cemetery provides a respite from the hustle and bustle of downtown. The headstones face west towards the original entrance off of the original Main Street. Most cemeteries that were platted in the centers of their communities have been relocated through time to accommodate



the growth of the business district. For that reason, Downers Grove’s Main Street Cemetery is a rarity – it is rumored to be one of only two in the country still in their original downtown locations.

In 1856, Samuel Curtiss donated part of his sheep pasture for use as a cemetery. He was later paid \$15 for the land by individuals who, in 1864, formed a cemetery association. Nearly 100 members of Downers Grove’s early families, including freed slave Israel Blackburn (1818-1902) and ten Civil War soldiers, are buried here. The cemetery was used until 1939 when Emma Foster Miller was the last to be interred.

17

5200 MAIN STREET CRESCY AUDITORIUM 1915

This brick building was built in 1915, on the site of Crescy Auditorium, after the clapboard structure burned to the ground. Originally three stories tall, the brick building was still used as a rental space for community events, had an open service area at the southeast corner, and served as a garage for Putnam-Pope Motor Company. Sometime in the late 1930s or 1940s, when a fire removed the third floor, the building was repaired and remodeled as a two-story structure. The

open service area was enclosed, and the front of the building was remodeled with glass block windows. By the 1950s, Stillwell Buick used it as a dealership and for auto service.

In 1996, Founder's Hill Brewery bought the building and extensively remodeled it into its current appearance by adding a cornice and shutters.



18

5221 MAIN STREET PENNER HARNESS, LEATHER GOODS AND SHOE REPAIR 1894



This is perhaps the best example of a typical 19th century "Main Street" building in Downers Grove. Built by C.F. Penner in 1894 for his harness business, this building has a front of hydraulically pressed, Victorian brick with common brick on the sides. The storefront is a rare local survivor from the turn of the last century, with

rolled-glass transoms, and lighted bulkheads that often illuminated a basement workroom. The building's pressed metal cornice would have been ordered out of a catalog and arrived by train. Made of zinc-plated steel, it is elaborately stamped on large machines, then crimped together and attached to a wood substrate that was anchored to the masonry back-up. Sold by the foot, these premanufactured cornices were an affordable way to obtain stylish building materials at a fraction of the cost of a cut-stone version. C. F. Penner began his harness shop in the 1880s and later switched to shoe repair as the need for horse tack waned. Penner provided a space for members of the Grand Army of the Republic to hold meetings.



19

1047 MAPLE AVENUE HENRY CARPENTER HOME 1843



Built by Henry Carpenter in 1843, this humble vernacular dwelling also contained Downers Grove's first general store and first post office. Its front-facing gable and side wing is typical of mid-19th century houses throughout the Midwest. His permanent residence was constructed across the street

in 1850. Carpenter was the first landowner in the community to subdivide his property into multiple small lots. In 1852 he donated land at the northwest corner of Maple and Main for the Methodist Episcopal Church. The original Main Street was west of the cemetery aligned at a slight northwest angle. He is buried in the Main Street Cemetery.



20

5300 MAIN STREET SUCHER BLACKSMITH SHOP 1875

Blacksmith and ironworker, James William Sucher, erected this humble brick building in 1875 as his smithy. James and his father, Phillip, established the business in 1854. This is the oldest brick building in Downers Grove and has walls one foot thick. The bricks were pressed most likely in the Excelsior Pressed Brick Factory that opened in 1872 at Gregg's Station (located east of Fairview Avenue and south of the railroad). In 1916, Sucher sold the building to another blacksmith, Harry O. Sutter, who shod horses and sharpened cultivator shovels in it until 1924. Sutter was in a perfect position to witness the transition from horses to automobiles and in reaction, opened the community's first Standard Service Station across the street in 1923. He closed his smithy the following year. Mrs. Sutter sold the building in 1975 to the architectural firm Richard Marker Associates, which remodeled it for its offices by adding a second floor, office suites, and sky-lights. The original half-moon windows in the gables were enlarged to full circles and fitted with plexiglass bubbles.



21

935 MAPLE AVENUE LINCOLN SCHOOL 1901

Lincoln School was built in 1901 on the site of the 1867 two-room Maple School. The handsome, red brick and chocolate sandstone structure has elements from a variety of Victorian-Era revival styles but applied to a symmetrical, Classically inspired body. In 1913 a three-story high school rear addition was erected. Two more additions were made between 1913 and 1939.



After the bell tower and attic were struck by lightning, the building was remodeled with a flat roof and some of its architectural details were simplified. The Downers Grove Park District

purchased the building in 1974 and remodeled the building to accommodate community events, classes, and offices, now known as the Lincoln Center.



22

831 MAPLE AVENUE ISRAEL BLODGETT HOME 1846

Israel Blodgett, an early settler of Downers Grove, built this simple Greek Revival house in 1846 to replace the small log cabin that his family had lived in since 1835. He used mortise and tenon joinery to fit wood beams into one another without the use of nails. The main part of the house has a "temple front", meaning that the gabled roof above the two-story mass resembles the pedimented front of an ancient Greek Temple. The cornice returns at the eaves of the two story portion are typical of Greek Revival houses of this period.

Israel and his wife, Avis, had strong abolitionist beliefs, and several sources document that they aided fugitive slaves escaping to Canada. They hosted up to 15 "freedom seekers" in the house at one time, hiding them in their root cellar or attic when the need arose.

When Charles built his Queen Anne home in 1892, he moved this structure to 812 Randall Road. When it faced demolition in 2007, the Downers Grove Heritage Preservation Corporation raised funds to relocate the house to the grounds of the Downers Grove Museum. The interior of the building is under renovation and is closed to the public.



23

831 MAPLE AVENUE CHARLES BLODGETT HOME 1892

Charles Blodgett built this Queen Anne house in 1892 on the foundation of a small frame house that he inherited from his father, Israel Blodgett. The house's elaborate, asymmetrical composition, wrap-around porch, various window shapes, and ornamental woodwork are all typical of the Queen Anne style.

Charles was a member of the DuPage County Board of Supervisors for 35 years and ran a dairy business from the property.

The house became the Downers Grove Museum in 1977, and its rooms have been appointed with furniture and artifacts from the Victorian period. Of special interest is the Victorian-era kitchen, in which 1890s chores and housekeeping are interpreted.



Preserving your property as a historic landmark is easier than ever and there's no cost, so call the Village or visit us on the web and let us help landmark your historic home today.

630.434.5515 | www.downers.us/govt/historic-preservation



This program receives federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended. The U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to:

**Office for Equal Opportunity
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127**

or

**Equal Employment Opportunity Officer
Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62702**

The activity, which is the subject of the brochure, has been financed in part with federal funds from the Department of the Interior administered by the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office, IDNR. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the Illinois SHPO, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Illinois SHPO.

