

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION – STAFF REPORT

Landmark Nomination: Public Hearing

Address:	1132-42 Lake St
Meeting Date:	January 09, 2025
Property Owner:	Azim Hemani - 1140 Lake Street LLC
Historic Designation:	Not currently located in a historic district or a listed Landmark
Historic Name:	The Oak Leaves Building
Zoning:	DT-1: Downtown - Central Sub-District
Project:	Nominated to be an Oak Park Historic Landmark by the property owner



2024 Photo

Historic Preservation Ordinance

Relevant sections of the Historic Preservation Ordinance include the following:

7-9-4: CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC LANDMARKS AND INTERIOR HISTORIC LANDMARKS:

A. The Commission, in determining whether to recommend for designation, and the Village Board, in determining whether to approve designation of particular sites, structures, or improvements as historic landmarks and/or interiors of structures or parts thereof as interior historic landmarks, shall consider the following criteria:

Historical And/ Or Cultural Importance

- 1. Significance as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social development or heritage of the Village of Oak Park, the state, or the United States;
- 2. Location as a site of a historic event, with a significant effect on the Village of Oak Park, the state, or the United States;
- Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social heritage, or other aspect, of the Village of Oak Park, the State, or the United States;

Architectural And/ Or Engineering Importance

- 4. Existence on the National Register of Historic Places;
- 5. Embodiment of those distinguishing characteristics of significant architectural type, or style, or engineering specimen;
- 6. Identification as the work of a builder, designer, architect, craftsperson, engineer or landscape architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the Village of Oak Park, the State, or the United States;
- 7. Contains design elements, detail, materials or craftsmanship that make the property or building structurally or architecturally innovative, rare or unique;
- 8. Representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social theme, style or period, expressed in distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings or structures that may or may not be contiguous.

B. Any site, structure or improvement that meets one or more of the above criteria shall also be at least fifty (50) years old and shall have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.

C. It shall be within the discretion of the Village Board to deny designation of any historic landmark, irrespective of whether or not the proposed landmark satisfies one or more of the above listed criteria. (Ord. 1999-0-7, 3-15-99)

7-9-5: NOMINATION AND PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR DESIGNATION AS AN HISTORIC LANDMARK OR INTERIOR HISTORIC LANDMARK:

A. Submission Of Nominations: Historic landmark and interior historic landmark nominations may be submitted to the Commission by any person, group of persons, or association, including any member of the Commission, on a nomination form provided by the Commission. The nomination form shall include, or be accompanied by, the following:

- 1. The name and address of the owner of the property proposed for designation, including the names of the beneficial owners of property held in a land trust, where possible.
- 2. The legal description and common street address of the property proposed for designation.
- 3. An indication of whether or not the owner is in favor of the proposed designation.
- 4. A written statement describing the property and setting forth reasons in support of the proposed designation.
- 5. Photographs of the property or selected properties within a district.
- 6. Such other information as may be required by the Commission.

Applicant's Proposal

The applicant, property owner Mr. Azim Hemani, has nominated 1132-42 Lake St known as the Oak Leaves Building to be an Oak Park Historic Landmark based on the following Criteria from Section 7-9-4 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance:

Historical And/ Or Cultural Importance

Criteria 1: Significance as an example of architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social development or heritage of the Village of Oak Park, the state, of the United States.

Criteria 3: Identification with a person or persons (in this case Marshall Field and Company Store) who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social heritage, or other aspect, of the Village of Oak Park, the State, or the United States.

Architectural And/ Or Engineering Importance

Criteria 5: Embodiment of those distinguishing characteristics of significant architectural type, or style, or engineering specimen.

Criteria 7: Contains design elements, detail, materials or craftsmanship that make the property or building structurally or architecturally innovative, rare or unique.

Criteria 8: Representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic or social theme, styles or period, expressed in distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings or structures that may or may not be contiguous.

As per Section 7-9-4E of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the Oak Leaves building is also over fifty (50) years old and has sufficient integrity of location, design, materials and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.

The property owner attended the HPC meeting on December 12, 2024 for a Preliminary Determination of Eligibility. The Historic Preservation Commission through a unanimous vote determined that the Oak Leaves Building is likely eligible to be nominated as an Oak Park Historic Landmark.

Historical Summary

Built in 1929 and designed by Samuel N. Crowen & Associates, the Oak Leaves Building was initially completed as a speculative professional office building with a top, fifth-floor suite for Oak Park's Oak Leaves newspaper. Early announcements for the Oak Leaves Building note its prime location "east and adjoining the new Oak Park home of Marshall Field & Co." The building was designed with four ground level commercial storefronts that flanked a central entrance to upper floor offices. Please refer to the attached nomination report for additional historical information.

Staff Comments

The Oak Leaves Building is significant for its association with the adjacent Marshall Field and Company Store and the development of a downtown Oak Park commercial district. The Oak Leaves Building has a remarkable interior and exterior integrity of finish and design for its association with Marshall Field and Woolworth. It is also significant for its unique Egyptian Art Deco façade which survives and contributes to the streetscape of downtown Oak Park. The limestone façade of the Oak Leaves Building retains most if not all of its original Egyptian Art Deco ornament. Most notable is the large, winged sun disk flanked by Egyptianized targets at the center of the parapet. Along the cornice runs a chevron motif which is interrupted by a stylized rosette relief above each row of windows below. The east and west 5th floor window heads of the center bay are decorated with winged scarabs. Verticality is expressed in these two rows of windows through the use of fluted jambs topped by winged griffin ornament. A variety of stylized windowsills and lintels are used to give the façade even more character. More traditional Art Deco relief panels are found at the spandrels, with the center bay spandrels being slightly more distinctive. The south façade from the 2nd floor up is the primary character defining feature of this building and retains a great deal of integrity (See nomination report for definitions of Art Deco architectural elements).

The Oak Leaves Building is greater than 50 years in age and retains historic integrity, and it appears to meet the criteria for eligibility to be listed as an Oak Park Historic Landmark. It is recommended that the Commission finds the Oak Leaves Building to be an eligible landmark and approve a resolution recommending designation to the Village Board.

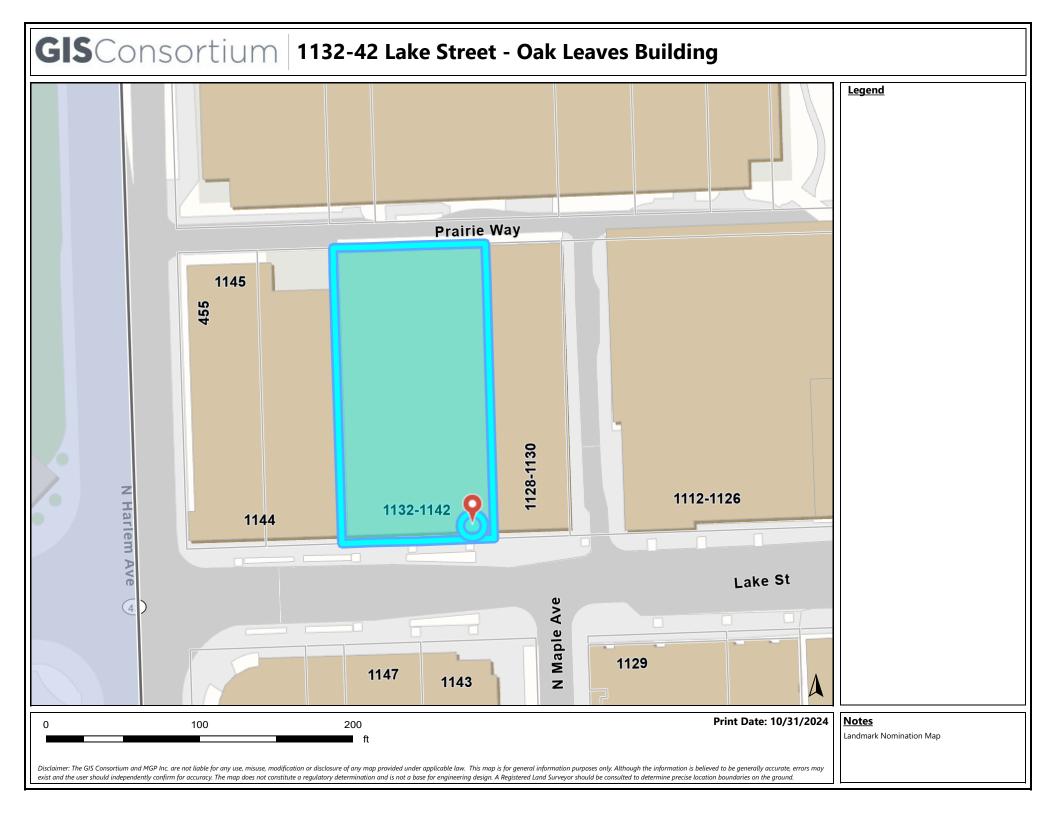


Landmarking Process:

- Preliminary Determination of Eligibility
 - At the first HPC meeting, the HPC must make a preliminary determination of whether the property is eligible based on the "Criteria for Designation" in 7-9-4 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (excerpt above).
- Landmark Hearing
 - If the HPC finds the property likely eligible, the HPC must hold a public hearing. At the public hearing, the HPC shall hear testimony and received evidence. Within 45 days of the hearing, the Commission shall determine whether to recommend designation of a historical landmark to the Village Board, based on the "Criteria for Designation" in 7-9-4 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (excerpt above). This decision may be made at the same meeting as the hearing or at a secondary meeting.
- Village Board Landmarking
 - Within 30 days of receipt of the HPC's resolution and report recommending designation of a landmark, the Village Board shall either designate a historic landmark or reject the nomination. The Village Board shall apply the designation criteria from 7-9-4, shall consider the record of the public hearing, and shall consider the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

Attachments

- Nomination form supplied by the property owner
- Nomination report supplied by the applicant
- Landmark nomination map
- Additional history, photos, and newspaper articles compiled by the applicant



Oak Park Landmark Nomination

Oak Leaves Building

Continuation Sheets

Narrative Description

The Oak Leaves Building is located at 1132-42 Lake Street near Harlem Avenue at the western edge of Oak Park. The building sits a block north of the elevated Green Line CTA Harlem stop which provides commuter access to downtown Chicago along with the Metra commuter stop in the same location. The building is square in form, 100' x 100', and five-stories tall. It occupies the entire lot and has no landscaping.

Exterior

The Oak Leaves Building is constructed of common brick with a decorative limestone façade featuring Egyptian Art Deco details on the primary south elevation facing Lake Street. The east and north elevations of the building are common brick within the exposed concrete structure. The west elevation abuts a seven-story building and is totally obscured. All upper floor windows are fixed replacements, but the opening sizes and locations remain unchanged from the original construction of the building. The existing windows on the south elevation along public-facing Lake Street have a simulated divided light pattern that references the original window design. The first-floor commercial space and storefront configuration is 1/3 west portion and 2/3 east portion from a 1940s renovation which changed from the original symmetrical design and central canopy at this level. The primary entry to upper levels of the building is via a recessed off-centered entry with a flat concrete segmented arch from the 1980s. The mostly flat roof of the Oak Leaves Building has a 10' tall penthouse constructed of buff brick, centered on the building east-to-west and slightly skewed to the north side of the roof.

Interior

The interior has a square floor plan with a stair and elevator shaft near the center of the building. This central stair extends from the basement up to the roof and the elevator extends from the basement up to the 5th floor. A second stair exists on the east side of the building. It extends from the basement up to the 2^{nd} floor and is located in the southeast corner of the building at these floors. At the 2^{nd} floor this stair shifts towards the center of the east wall and extends up to the 5^{th} floor.

Upper floors are open except for regularly spaced original concrete columns and floor structure, some with remaining plaster finish. The western 1/3 of floors two through five have a much longer span and larger columns than those to the east. A row of large columns which aligns with the east side of the current elevator cab is the last column on the west side of the building at a span of about 34' in the east-west direction. All columns to the east are more closely spaced and smaller, at a span of about 20' in the east-west direction. All columns are evenly spaced in the north-south direction at about 20'.

Most interior walls and ceilings have been stripped of finishes down to the structure although some plaster remains on columns and ceilings. All flooring has been removed exposing the original floor slab on upper floors. The 2nd floor has a shallow concrete ramp in the northwest corner leading to a steel hyphen which provides access to the rear building on the site, the adjacent building to the west as well as the parking structure to the north of the building.

Floor plans have changed over the life of the building although no structural changes are obvious throughout the building. Although this building is believed to all have been built at the same time, structural variations can be observed. Most of the building is reinforced concrete however some steel floor structure exists on the east side near the stair enclosure on several floors. Ceiling heights seem to have originally varied with the west end being higher than the east when observing the distance from the floor to the underside of the exposed concrete joists.

A large department store occupied the eastern two-thirds of the ground floor for many years and the ground floor configuration remains from that time. A hallway runs down the entire length of the east wall of the building at the ground floor.

Statement of Significance

Historical Importance:

The Oak Leaves Building is significant for its association with the adjacent Marshall Field and Company Store and the development of a downtown Oak Park commercial district. It is also significant for its unique Egyptian Art Deco façade which survives and contributes to the streetscape of downtown Oak Park.

Built in 1929 and designed by Samuel N. Crowen & Associates, the Oak Leaves Building was initially completed as a speculative professional office building with a top, fifth-floor suite for Oak Park's *Oak Leaves* newspaper. Beyond serving as the main offices for the local newspaper, the building had no purpose except to satisfy a demand for office space, particularly for dentists and doctors, according to one early advertisement.¹ The inclusion of ground floor retail was common use that had been typical for most buildings since the late nineteenth century. However, Lake Street was already in the process of becoming Oak Park's primary shopping destination. Upper floor retail was the answer to growing demand.

Early announcements for the Oak Leaves Building note its prime location "east and adjoining the new Oak Park home of Marshall Field & Co."² The building was designed with four ground level commercial storefronts that flanked a central entrance to upper floor offices. The upper floors were accessible via two elevators and were left without major partitions, but ownership could, "subdivide floors to suit the needs of prospective tenants."³ Early speculative floor plans in advertising materials for the building's office space indicate where partitions could be built, but it is not clear how offices were typically arranged in the building. At minimum, each floor was

¹ "Advertisement for the Oak Leaves Building," Oak Leaves, June 1, 1929, 15.

² "Advertisement for the Oak Leaves Building," Oak Leaves, May 4, 1929, 15.

³ Ibid.

provided with a small elevator and stair lobby; however, corridors were not part of the planned construction unless floor plates needed to be subdivided to accommodate multiple office suites.

During the 1940s, as Lake Street continued to grow and expand as a major regional commercial shopping destination, the Oak Leaves building shed its office space to become a significant retail building. In 1940, the offices of the *Oak Leaves* newspaper left the building's fifth floor. Five years later in April 1946, neighboring Marshall Field & Co. signed a lease for the entire fifth floor former Oak Leaves space.⁴ By this time, Marshall Field had begun to outgrow its purpose-built branch store from 1929 and required additional space to meet consumer demand in the Oak Park region. The Oak Leaves Building served as the easiest means for expansion as it was an existing and open space that was purposely designed with flexible floor areas free of large defined public circulation spaces, such as corridors. In contrast, the Marshall Field & Co.'s Evanston branch store was never expanded, but unlike the Oak Park branch store, it also did not benefit from as steadily an increasing consumer base, nor did it have adjoining existing commercial space that could be easily linked.

As part of the Oak Leaves Building lease, Marshall Field linked the fifth floor to the main adjoining Marshall Field & Co. building via a stairway from its fourth floor. This connection is noted in a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map published in 1948.⁵ Within the fifth floor space, according to historic photographs taken by Hedrich-Blessing in July 1946, Marshall Field opened a new household department, with display areas for appliances, housewares, China, and glassware.⁶ The 1946 photographs show that new terrazzo stairs were built in the Marshall Field & Co. building to reach the fifth floor space in the Oak Leaves Building. The new sales floor area was remodeled with new acoustic vinyl tile floors in a checkerboard pattern, while the walls and ceilings were treated with a flat plaster finish. Beams between the columns featured simple picture rail type moldings. Rows of plain lights with glass shades illuminated the space. Overall, the new household department was an open sales area with temporary cabinets and display racks. This space remains largely intact in volume and finish, with plaster finished outer walls, columns, ceilings, and ceiling beams. Decorative picture rail molding also remains intact.

The Oak Leaves Building was fully transformed in 1949 into a retail space. Marshall Field & Co. expanded its sales floors across the second, third, and fourth floors of the Oak Leaves Building and linked these spaces to the existing Marshall Field & Co. Building. It is possible that Marshall Field & Co. engaged the firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White to design the remodeled space in the Oak Leaves Building. The firm was responsible for the branch store and several other projects with the retailer. The department store's expansion reflects the company's great need for sales space to meet growing consumer demand. The expansion went a step further and made the new sales floors in the Oak Leaves Building self-contained and only accessible from Marshall Fields. Because all upper floors in the Oak Leaves Building were now part of Marshall Fields there was no longer a need for a central elevator or for access from the building's original Lake Street

⁴ "West Suburbs," *Realty and Building*, volume 115, 1946, 80.

⁵ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Oak Park, Illinois, Sheet 31, 1948, Library of Congress.

⁶ Household department in Marshall Field & Company store in Oak Park (III.) annex store [graphic], Hedrich-Blessing photograph collection -- Marshall Field & Company series, Chicago History Museum.

entrance. According to a Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map published in 1950, the original elevators and stairs in the Oak Leaves Building were removed entirely, while connecting passages to the Marshall Field & Co. Building were made on all upper floors.⁷ This remodeling effectively transformed the upper floors of the Oak Leaves Building into a contained retail space that was only accessible from the Marshall Field & Co. Building.

The ground floor of the Oak Leaves Building originally featured four storefronts that flanked a central entrance to the building's upper floors. In 1949, with the greater remodeling of the upper floors for Marshall Field & Co., the ground floor was significantly remodeled for the F. W. Woolworth & Co. chain store. Woolworth created a new commercial space by combining three existing storefronts at 1136, 1138, and 1140 Lake, along with the Oak Leaves Building's original main entrance and lobby.⁸ Woolworth's effectively occupied the eastern three-quarters of the ground floor storefront. A fourth remaining storefront at 1144 Lake (western end of the building) was separated from the new Woolworth space by a clay tile partition.⁹ Woolworth also built a new one- and two-story addition at the rear (north) end of the Oak Leaves Building that both increased the sales floor and added storage and mechanical spaces.¹⁰ As part of the construction of the Woolworth space, all existing partitions, ceilings, and the original storefront were removed. A fragment of the building's original ceiling plasterwork that was not removed as part of the Woolworth remodel is visible in the former 1140 Lake Street space, which was occupied during the 1930s and 1940s by the Hylands store. Historic photographs show that Woolworth installed its characteristic red banner and gold lettered sign above its storefront. A vertical blade sign with the name "Woolworth's" was added to the front of the Oak Leaves Building by the 1960s, according to historic photo postcard.¹¹

Marshall Field & Co. continued to occupy the upper floors of the Oak Leaves Building until 1984, and fully closed its Oak Park store in 1986. A new owner bought the Oak Leaves Building in 1985 and rehabilitated it for office use. As part of this work, a new elevator and stair, as well as a new Lake Street entrance and storefronts were created.¹² In 1990, the F. W. Woolworth & Co. store closed.¹³ The ground floor retail has continued to change over the last three decades.

Marshall Field and Woolworth became the longest occupants of the Oak Leaves Building and helped define the building as it appears today. Despite being built as a grand Egyptian Art Deco office building, the Oak Leaves Building became a grand, multi-level shopping tower that housed two major retailers that grew substantially during the mid-twentieth century. This growth benefited from Oak Park's cyclical pattern of population, retail, and revenue growth that buoyed the area through the Great Depression and into the Post World War II boom period. The Oak Leaves

⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Oak Park, Illinois, Sheet 31, 1950, Library of Congress.

⁸ "F. W. Woolworth Co.," Chain Store Age, 1949, 198.

⁹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, 1950.

¹⁰ "F. W. Woolworth Co.," 198.

¹¹ Lake Street, Oak Park, [n.d.] Post Card, Ebay; Lake Street east from Harlem Avenue, 1974, The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest.

¹² Harriet Vrba, "Redone Oak Leaves Building Debuts," Oak Leaves, May 7, 1986.

¹³ Eric Linden, "Downtown Woolworth's Closing," *Wednesday Journal*, July 19, 1989, 1.

Building facilitated the growth and expansion of these retailers in the Lake Street commercial district.

Marshall Field & Co. is significant on its own, and its adjoining purpose-built branch store is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Oak Leaves Building is significant for its association with this retailer in the building's capacity as a viable and muchneeded expansion space. The building was not only conveniently adjoined to the Marshall Field Building, but it was designed with a flexible floor plan with limited public circulation spaces on upper floors. Partitions were built only to suit tenants' needs and Marshall Field & Co. needed open floor plates. Without the Oak Leaves Building, the landlocked Marshal Field & Co. would have needed to build an addition or move to another location.

The Oak Leaves Building has very good interior and exterior integrity of finish and design for its association with Marshall Field and Woolworth. Throughout the period that Marshall Field & Co. occupied the Oak Leaves Building, the sales floors were likely remodeled, refinished with new flooring, casework, and lighting systems to keep up with changing retail standards. Despite these changes, the upper floors remained open shopping spaces with circulation patterns defined not by permanent partitions but by typical department store fixtures, furniture, displays, and visual pathways. These transient finishes were fully removed during the building's conversion back to office space. Although new partitions were built as part of this rehabilitation, the overall spaces created by Marshall Field & Co. remain largely intact. Existing plaster wall, column, and ceiling finishes were revealed and maintained, while later 1980s-era partitions and dropped ceilings have been removed.

Architectural Importance:

The limestone façade of the Oak Leaves Building retains most if not all of its original Egyptian Art Deco ornament. Most notable is the large, winged sun disk flanked by Egyptianized targets at the center of the parapet. Along the cornice runs a chevron motif which is interrupted by a stylized rosette relief above each row of windows below. The east and west 5th floor window heads of the center bay are decorated with winged scarabs. Verticality is expressed in these two rows of windows through the use of fluted jambs topped by winged griffin ornament. This beautifully rendered Egyptian detail that extend from the 2nd up through the 5th floor are believed to represent sceptres. These same bays of windows have the most protruded element on the façade with their rounded 2nd floor sills. All other jambs on the south elevation connect the 2nd floor sills up to the 5th floor window heads in a more muted protruding jamb which further gives the façade a vertical feel. A variety of stylized windowsills and lintels are used to give the façade even more character. More traditional Art Deco relief panels are found at the spandrels, with the center bay spandrels being slightly more distinctive. The south façade from the 2nd floor up is the primary character defining feature of this building and retains a great deal of integrity.



Oak Leaves Building – 1132-42 Lake St

Major Bibliographical References:

"Advertisement for the Oak Leaves Building." Oak Leaves, May 4, 1929, 15.

"Advertisement for the Oak Leaves Building." Oak Leaves, June 1, 1929, 15.

"F. W. Woolworth Co." Chain Store Age, 1949, 198.

- Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Ways and Means... Seventy-Fifth Congress, Third Session on H. R. 1, A Bill Providing for an Excise Tax on Retail Stores, Volume 1. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940.
- Household department in Marshall Field & Company store in Oak Park (III.) annex store [graphic], Hedrich-Blessing photograph collection -- Marshall Field & Company series, Chicago History Museum.
- Inghram, Cheryl. *Marshall Field and Company Store*, Oak Park, Illinois, National Register of Historic Places nomination form (NR# 87002510), 1988.
- Lake Street east from Harlem Avenue, 1974. Photograph. The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest.

Lake Street, Oak Park, [n.d.] Post Card, site: Ebay.com.

Linden, Eric. "Downtown Woolworth's Closing." Wednesday Journal, July 19, 1989, 1.

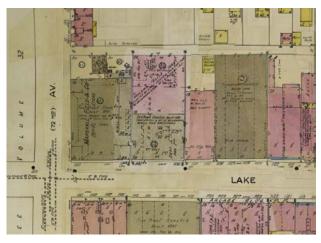
Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Oak Park, Illinois, Sheet 31, 1948. Library of Congress.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Oak Park, Illinois, Sheet 31, 1950. Library of Congress.

Vrba, Harriet. "Redone Oak Leaves Building Debuts." Oak Leaves, May 7, 1986.

"West Suburbs." Realty and Building, volume 115, 1946, 80.





1947 Sanborn map

1950 Sanborn map

Definition/ Meaning of the Art Deco Ornaments:

Terminology	Photo
Winged sun disk flanked by Egyptianized targets The winged sun disk is a solar symbol that was used in many ancient cultures, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Persia. The winged sun disk is a symbol that represents divine authority; royalty; the soul without a physical form, and the journey of the sun; protection; good words, thoughts, and deeds; Victory of light over darkness, etc.	
Chevron motif A decorative motif (pattern) resembling an inverted V The chevron pattern is a defining motif of the Art Deco movement, which took place in the 1920s and 1930s. The chevron pattern's geometric form and emphasis on symmetry were central to the Art Deco movement.	
Stylized rosette relief: A symbol of divine protection and divine fertility.	
Winged scarabs: In ancient Egyptian culture, the winged scarab is a symbol of rebirth, protection, and a safe journey to the afterlife, as well as good luck and fortune.	
Fluted jambs A type of door/ window trim that feature flutes, or grooves, that run the length of the molding.	SCHARD SCHIRD SCHIRD SCHIRD SCHIRD SCHIRD 0 <t< td=""></t<>
Winged griffin ornament The griffin's origins can be traced back to ancient Egyptian art, where it was used as an ornamental placard and on high- end cosmetic palettes. The winged griffin is a mythical creature that symbolizes Protection, Strength, Courage, Wisdom and power, Justice and fidelity, Nobility, and Loyalty.	
Egyptian Screptes A scepter is a ceremonial staff or wand used by a ruling monarch to signify sovereign authority.	1

Art Deco relief panels A relief panel is a wall-mounted sculpture that features three- dimensional elements that are raised from a flat base. The term "relief" comes from the Italian word relievare, which means "to raise".	
Spandrels The area between the sill of a window and the head of the window below it.	







































