



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION – STAFF REPORT

HPC2020-17

### PUBLIC HEARING

**Address:** 203 S Marion St  
**Meeting Date:** September 10, 2020  
**Property Owner:** 203 S Marion Street Corporation  
**Project Architect:** Focus Construction / Booth Hansen  
**Historic Designation:** Contributing Resource in the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District  
**Zoning:** DT Downtown  
**Project Description:** Demolish existing historic building and garage  
**Guidelines:** Historic Preservation Ordinance & Secretary of the Interior's Standards



### Historic Preservation Ordinance

The following sections from the Historic Preservation Ordinance address demolition (note that these are excerpts and summaries; for full text see the respective Ordinance section):

**7-9-1:** The purpose of this article is to promote the economic, educational, cultural and general welfare of Oak Park by:

- A. Providing a municipal process to identify, preserve, protect and enhance the distinctive historic and architectural heritage of Oak Park representing elements of the Village's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;

- B. Conserving and improving the value of properties designated as historic landmarks or located within historic districts;
- C. Enhancing the attractiveness of the Village to homeowners, visitors, tourists, and shoppers and, thereby, supporting business, commerce and industry in the Village and providing economic benefits to the Village;
- D. Fostering civic pride in the accomplishments of the past as manifested in properties, structures, improvements and areas of historical and architectural significance within the Village;
- E. Fostering and encouraging the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of properties, structures, improvements and areas and, thereby, preventing deterioration, dilapidation and blight.

**7-9-2:** Definitions: Non-Contributing Resource - a property within a historic district that does not represent significant historical and/or aesthetic characteristics which qualified the area as a historic district.

**7-9-12(A):** Review criteria for COAs. The HPC should consider the effect of the COA on the historic, aesthetic or architectural value, characteristics and significance of the historic district.

**7-9-12(B):** The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Architectural Review Guidelines should be used when considering demolition. Standard 2 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards encourages the retention and preservation of the significant original qualities and/or character of a property. If a property is determined to be a Non-Contributing Resource, then the HPC must approve the COA without further review.

## **Architectural Review Guidelines**

The purpose for architectural review is to protect the unique visual qualities of a building and its site that define their sense of history from inappropriate proposed alterations that will reduce that sense.

The relevant standards from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation include the following:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. **The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.**
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

**Section A** of the Architectural Review Guidelines (preamble) states that their purpose is to protect unique visual qualities of a building and site and determine if siting, massing, scale, materials and street rhythm are compatible with the neighborhood context.

**Section B** further discusses establishing contextual character through the following:

- a) Siting – trees, landscaping, building setbacks, garage access, driveways
- b) Massing – building height, roof forms and shapes
- c) Scale – number of stories, lot width to building width
- d) Materials – Roof, walls, trim, windows, porches
- e) Street rhythm – Historic styles in the area, massing, roof forms of adjacent buildings

## **Applicant's Proposal**

The applicant plans to demolish the existing building and garage at 203 S Marion St. The applicant intends to build a new building at this location.

Due to substantial alterations completed outside the district's period of significance (1870-1929), the applicant has also requested that the Historic Preservation Commission provide their recommendations on whether the building may be reconsidered as non-contributing. While reclassification must ultimately come from the National Park Service, the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office would ask for the Commission's recommendations should a reclassification request be made.

## **Historical Summary**

The history of 203 S Marion St and its historical context (the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District) has been divided into the following sections:

1. **Statement of Significance:** a summary of the building and how it fits into the district
2. **History:** a physical and cultural history of the building including building permit records
3. **The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District:** summary of the district and why it is significant
4. **Contributing to the Historic District:** determining contributing status within the district

Please see historic Sanborn maps (in attachments) for a visual record of the building and surrounding neighborhood over time.

## 1. Statement of Significance for 203 S Marion St

203 S Marion St is listed as a contributing building within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District. It contributes to the story of the historic district on multiple levels: it is an example of the district's early single-family architecture and it directly embodies the growth and change of the district from a largely single-family neighborhood to a neighborhood noted for its diversity of building types. Reflective of the growth and change of the neighborhood around the turn of the century, the building was converted from a single-family dwelling into apartments by prominent local architect E. E. Roberts. It is unknown if there were any exterior changes made at this time or if those changes are extant. While the building continues to tell the story of the growing and changing neighborhood in its conversion to the Drechsler Funeral Home in 1933, this change and the associated alterations fall outside the district's period of significance (1870-1929). As such, the expansive brick addition that obscures the original front façade detracts greatly from the building's historic integrity and its ability to successfully contribute to the historic district.

## 2. History of 203 S Marion St

203 S Marion St (originally 203 Wisconsin Ave) was built in 1881 by James Campbell Rogers (1841-1927). Rogers, a pioneer settler originally from New York, lived with his family in the house for 45 years, until 1926. Rogers was a prominent early Oak Park resident, grain merchant, and a member of the Chicago Board of Trade for fifty years. Rogers notably gifted a Frank Lloyd Wright house, the Frank Thomas House (210 Forest Ave, 1901), to his daughter and her husband as a wedding gift.

While James Rogers's wife, Mary Rogers, lived the last four years of her life at 233 Linden Ave, her obituary noted that "the Rogers homestead [203 S Marion St] was for many years the center of social life in the village and its hospitable doors were always open to friends as well as to community interests" (Oak Leaves, September 26, 1930). In 1920, the Rogers had 203 S Marion St converted into two apartments in 1920 by E. E. Roberts.

203 S Marion St was sold to Earl Drechsler in ca. 1926. Drechsler owned a funeral home business founded in 1880 by J. W. Senne and bought out by his father, Charles Drechsler, in 1894. The original Drechsler Funeral Home was built by Charles Drechsler in 1894 at 1116 Lake St. Earl Drechsler converted 203 S Marion St into a funeral home with the help of architect Norman D. Barfield and moved the business to 203 S Marion St in 1933. At the opening of the new location in 1933, the Drechsler Funeral Home was the only funeral home in Oak Park. It was noted in a 1933 Oak Leaves article that the new location could accommodate 300 and the opening was attended by 500 people. A later addition and alterations occurred in 1957 by architect John Barr Todd for Earl A. Drechsler.

**Building Timeline** (building permits in bold, sources for other items below):

1881: Built

Owner: James Campbell Rogers

**1920, April 20 – Changing old residence to apartments.** Metal lath and cement plaster interior walls and ceiling of stair hall to upper apartment.

Owner: W. E. Rogers

Architect: E. E. Roberts

Contractor: J. L. S. Bernard

Cost: \$7,000

**1922, April 18 – Porch extension**

Owner: W. E. Rogers  
Contractor: J. L. S. Bernard  
Cost: \$500

**1922, Nov. 27 – Enclose second floor sleeping porch**

Owner: James C. Rogers  
Contractor: J. L. S. Bernard  
Cost: \$500

1926: James Campbell Rogers died; property subsequently sold to Earl Drechsler

**1933, Aug. 31 – Neighborhood petition** in support of allowing an undertaking establishment

**1933, Sep. 22 – Alterations for a funeral home**

Owner: Earl A. Drechsler  
Architect: Norman D. Barfield  
Contractor: C. Nelson  
Cost: \$2,275

**1938, July 21 – Convert old barn into a garage**

Owner: Earl Drechsler  
Contractor: Martin Schulz  
Cost: \$265

**1957, Aug. 19 – Addition and alteration to funeral chapel**

Owner: Earl A. Drechsler  
Architect: John Barr Todd  
Contractor: Continental Construction Company

**References:**

Newspaper Articles (courtesy of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest):

- 1927. Oak Leaves. "James Campbell Rogers: Pioneer of Village and Distinguished Chicago Business Man Passes in His 86<sup>th</sup> Year." January 22, 1927.
- 1930. Oak Leaves. "Mrs. James C. Rogers: Death Takes Women Who Was Distinguished in Oak Park Affairs for a Half Century." September 26, 1930.
- 1933. Oak Leaves. "Funeral Home Opens; Attracts A Large Crowd." December 21, 1933.
- 1971. Chicago Tribune. "Group is Fighting Time for Oak Park Landmark." July 13, 1972. (Thomas House)

Village of Oak Park Building Permit Records

Cook County Recorder of Deeds

### **3. The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District**

The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District is significant under three National Register criteria:

- Criterion A for its broad pattern of suburban development,
- Criterion B (more locally but to some extent nationally) for the architects who designed the buildings in the district, and
- Criterion C for architecture.

The period of significance for the Historic District is 1870-1929.

The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District illustrates a regional and national shift in both architecture and suburban development, including the major re-orientation of domestic architecture from 19th century eclecticism to 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism, and community planning meant to incorporate a greater variety of building types into what was originally a single-family dwelling setting.

The Historic District's important historic role in suburban development stems largely from its integration of single-family housing with apartment and commercial buildings. The Village Board's first building ordinance adopted in 1902 reflected a local concern for the increase in apartment building construction, detailing requirements for including maximum dimensions, access to natural light, and safety protocols.

Prominent local architect E. E. Roberts was among those to address design challenges associated with the neighborhood's growth. Design solutions used by E. E. Roberts and others included adapting existing single-family buildings into multi-family buildings, designing duplexes, and designing apartment buildings that met existing building lines, offered open porches for apartment dwellings, and provided light and green space. Buildings like E. E. Roberts' Quadrangle Apartments (108-110 S East Ave) were celebrated for having more features in common with private suburban residences than they typical urban flat buildings of the era.

#### **References:**

Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form

- Original 1983 version available here: <http://gis.hpa.state.il.us/PDFs/201196.pdf>
- Current version and continuation sheets available here: <https://www.oak-park.us/village-services/planning/historic-preservation/historic-preservation-booklets-reports>

### **4. Contributing to the Historic District**

203 S Marion St is listed as a contributing resource in the original 1983 Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District National Register nomination. The nomination also lists buildings deemed "significant" among the contributing buildings; 203 S Marion St is not included in this list.

The National Register Bulletin "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" states:

a "component of a district cannot contribute to the significance if:

- it has been substantially altered since the period of the district's significance *or*
- it does not share the historic associations of the district."

The bulletin further states that if a property's exterior is covered by a non-historic false-front or curtain wall, that it cannot be considered a contributing element in a historic district as it does not add to the

district's sense of time and place. If the false front is removed and the original building materials are intact, then the property's integrity can be re-evaluated.

It is important also to consider the historic integrity of a historic resource. The National Register uses the seven aspects of integrity:

- **Design** is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
- **Setting** is the physical environment of the historic property.
- **Materials** are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.
- **Workmanship** is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
- **Feeling** is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.
- **Association** is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

While 203 S Marion St does not feature a false front, a non-historic addition obscures the first floor of the front, south side, and rear elevations. It is unclear if the original building materials are still found within the addition, but it may be unlikely due to the interior alterations that were likely necessary to convert the building from apartments to a funeral home. The general massing of the house is still apparent, but the numerous non-historic alterations have detracted from the building's historic integrity.

#### References:

National Park Service.1995. National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. Available online at: [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15\\_web508.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15_web508.pdf)

## Staff Comments

### Historic Preservation Commission 6.17.20

The applicant previously attended the Historic Preservation Commission meeting on June 17, 2020. At that meeting, the HPC took no action. They requested additional information including additional information about the building's history and alterations made. Commissioners also requested additional information on the project proposed, particularly whether the restoration or inclusion of the historic building was considered as part of the project. The applicant requested a public hearing on June 19, 2020. The applicant submitted an addendum to their original June submission on 8/27/20 including additional details about the buildings alterations as requested.

Minutes from the June 17, 2020 meeting are attached. The meeting recording may also be found on the Village website, here: <https://www.oak-park.us/your-government/citizen-commissions/commission-tv>

### **Staff Recommendations: Certificate of Appropriateness**

203 S Marion St is listed as a contributing resource in the original 1983 Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District National Register nomination and is included in the current list of contributing properties (last updated in 2017). It is recommended that demolition of a contributing resources within a historic district does not comply with the Oak Park Historic Preservation Ordinance or Architectural Review Guidelines.

### **Staff Recommendations: Discussion of Building's Contributing Status**

Additionally, it is recommended that the HPC discuss the contributing status of the building and provide their recommendation as to whether they agree with the listed status. They should specifically consider the number of additions and alterations completed after 1929 and therefore outside the period of significance for the district. Historic resources with "substantial" non-historic alterations may lack the historic integrity necessary to contribute to the criteria for which the historic district is significant.

If the HPC determines that the contributing status is in question, while the HPC does not have the authority to alter the status, the applicant may consider requesting the National Park Service re-evaluate the property. The authority to reclassify resources as non-contributing falls on the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, a National Park Service official. Such a request would also involve the HPC and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office.

If the HPC determines that the contributing status is appropriate, they should provide specific reasons the building meets the requirements for contributing status within the district (see Historical Summary section 4, "Contributing to the Historic District").

### **Attachments**

- Materials provided by Village staff:
  - o Village photographs from 2014
  - o Sanborn maps illustrating the building's context 1895-1950
  - o Meeting minutes from 6/17/20 (see item M)
- Applicant submission materials:
  - o Historic Overview Addendum, submitted 8/27/20
  - o Historic Overview packet from HPC meeting 6/17/20
  - o Certificate of Appropriateness form



**Village Photos 2014 (supplied by staff)**



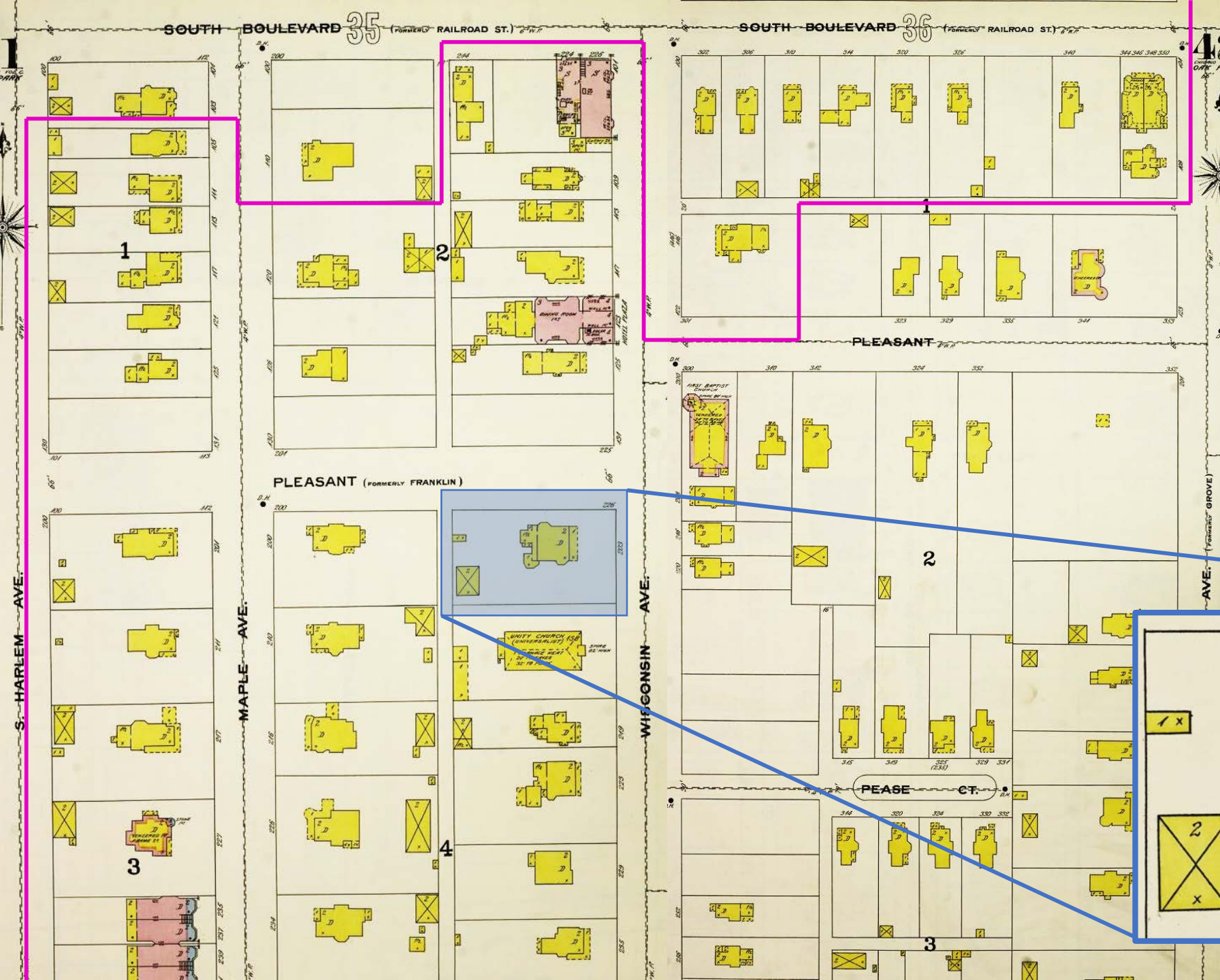
**Village Photos 2014 (supplied by staff)**





**Village Photos 2014 (supplied by staff)**





# 1895 Sanborn Map

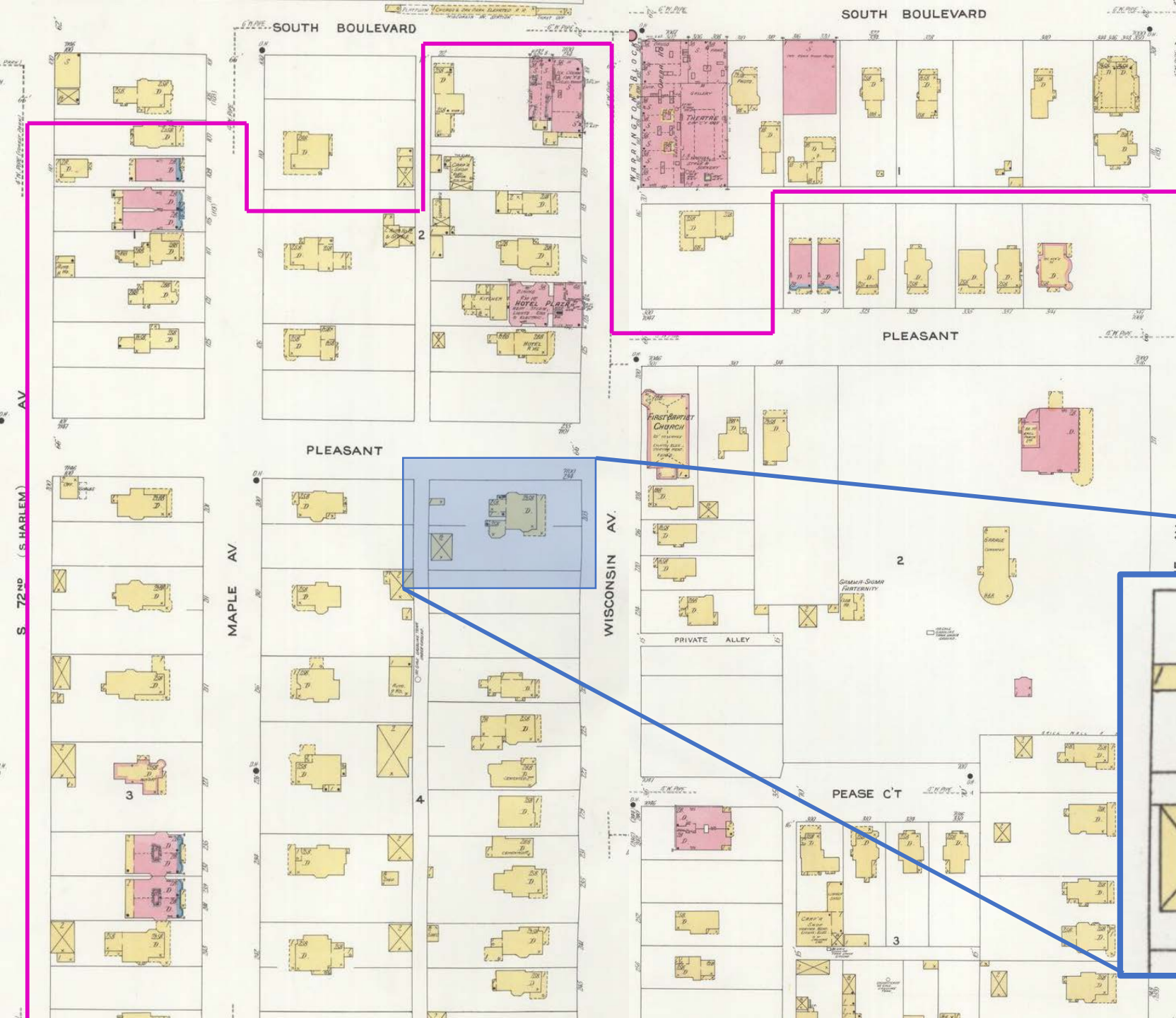
Library of Congress

— Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District border



Prepared by Village staff





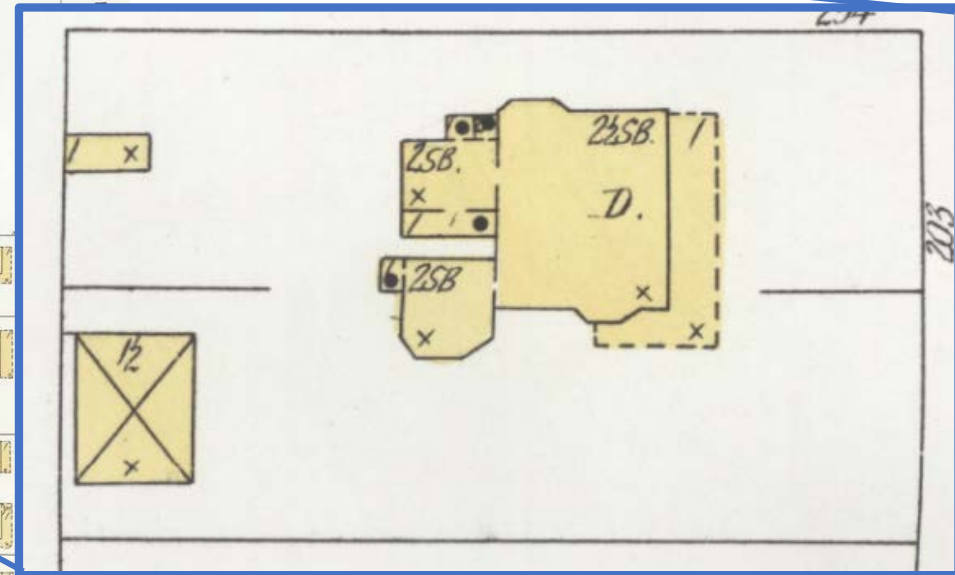
# 1908 Sanborn Map

Library of Congress

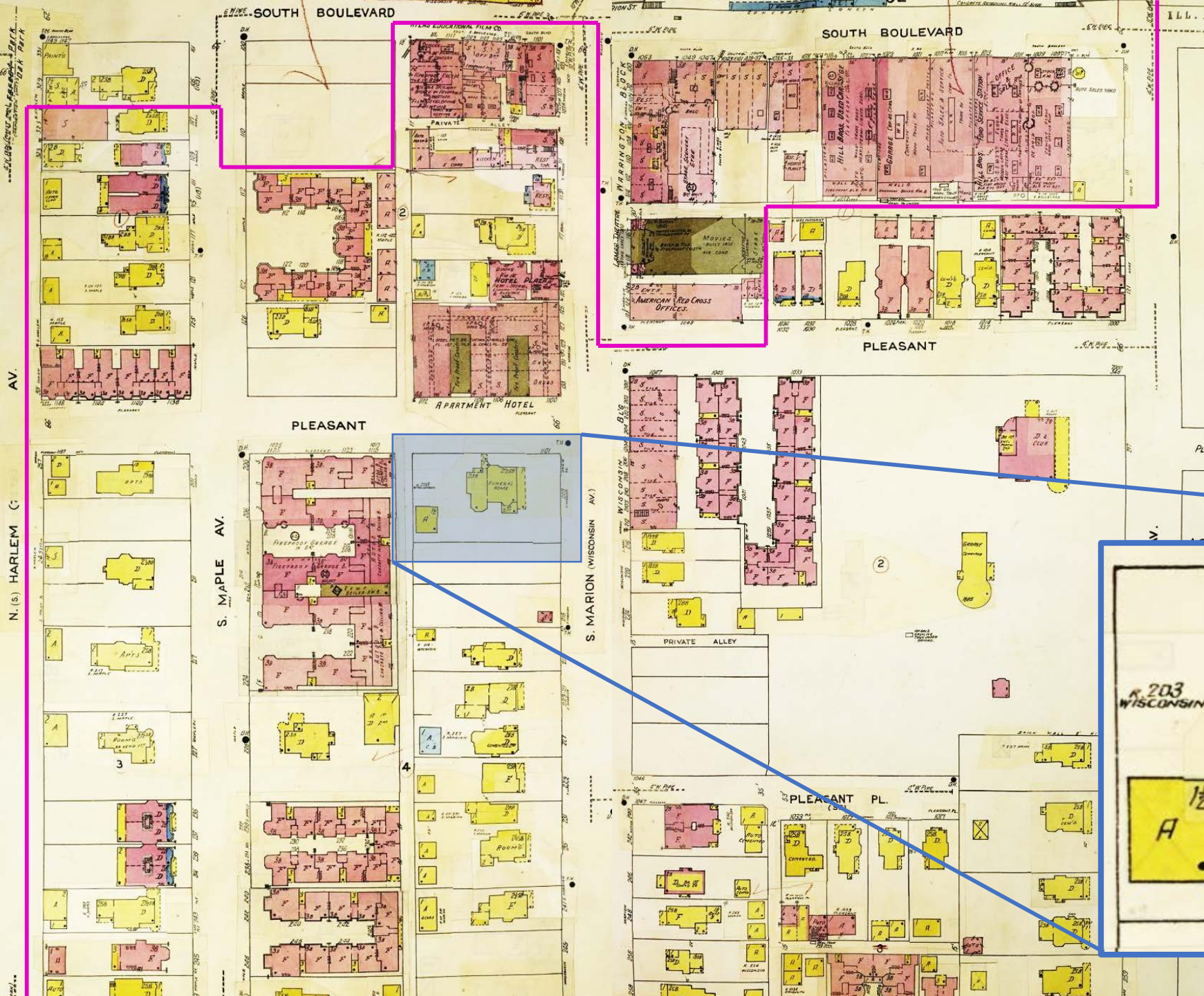
— Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District border



Prepared by Village staff







## 1950 Sanborn Map

Library of Congress

 Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District border

Prepared by Village staff

