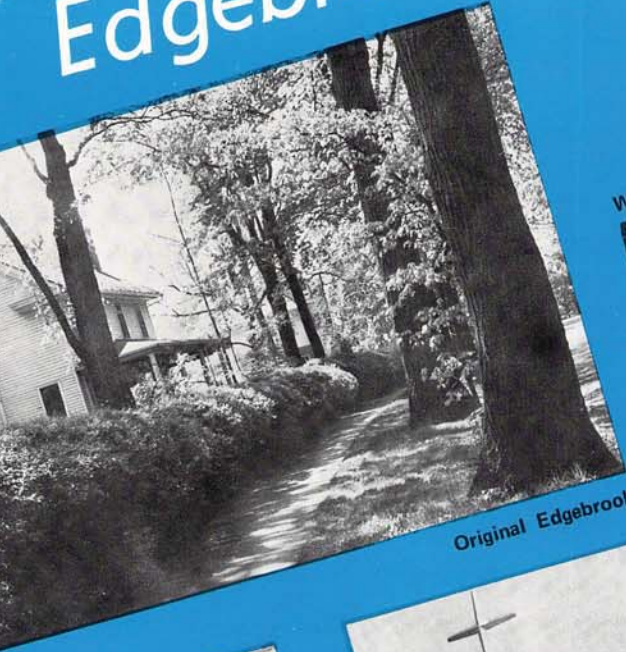


Edgebrook



Original Edgebrook

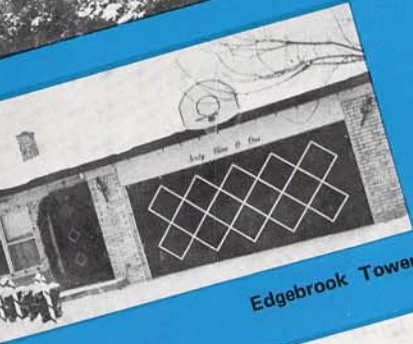
Wildwood



Edgebrook Towers



St. Mary of the Woods



North Edgebrook



from
Billy
Caldwell
to
1973



This "History of Edgebrook" was initiated by the Edgebrook Community Association in 1971 by the recommendation of its President, Mr. Hans Pierce.

Mr. Herbert H. Muehl, Vice President, was commissioned to complete this undertaking. Northwestern University, Department of History was contacted and accepted the undertaking. Miss Kathy Long researched and wrote the main content. She graduated "With Honors" on the basis of this work. We are indebted to Miss Long for this publication being a reality. Her writing was supplemented by a number of long time Edgebrook residents including Mr. Burt Dean, the son of an original Edgebrook resident.

Although there are no advertisements, we wish to acknowledge the financial participation of Wildwood Realty, McKey and Poague and Baird and Warner local real estate offices.

*Herbert H. Muehl
Vice President
Edgebrook Community Association*



Foreword

The greatest source of information for this booklet were the residents of Edgebrook. Besides Edgebrook residents, the following sources were consulted: the Bureau of Maps and Plats of the City of Chicago; the Forest Preserve District; various church records; a chronologically uneven sampling of the two community newspapers, the *Edgebrook Events* and the *Weekly Reporter*; the Cook County Recorder's Office; the offices of the Milwaukee Road; community studies of Chicago which include Edgebrook; Chicago directories; and various historical writings by Edgebrook residents. One of the greatest sources of information was the minutes of the Edgebrook Community Association dating back to 1939. For background information concerning Chicago history, the primary sources of information were *Andreas' History of Cook County*, *Moses and Kirkland's History of Chicago*, and *Chicago: The Growth of a Metropolis* by Harold M. Mayer and Richard C. Wade. Burt Dean, a son of an early resident, in a review of this work consulted the Department of Development and Planning, in the Chicago City Hall.

Edgebrook Today

Edgebrook is a small residential area in the northwest corner of Chicago and is part of the City of Chicago. It is bordered on the north and northwest by the suburb of Niles, on the north by the Village of Skokie, on the northeast by Lincolnwood, and on the south by Elston Avenue.

The community is divided nearly in half by the tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (also known as the Milwaukee Road). Three main streets slice Edgebrook: Devon Avenue, running east-west; Central Avenue, running north-south; and Caldwell Avenue, running northwest-southeast.

Edgebrook consists of six recognized subdivisions.

A. **Original Edgebrook** — the area south of Devon, west of the railroad tracks, and north and east of the Chicago River. This area is completely surrounded by forest preserve and contains only about two dozen homes.

B. **Edgebrook, or Edgebrook Manor** — the area bounded on the north by N. Dowagiac and the city limits, on the east by the Edens, on the south by the Billy Caldwell Golf Course and the Forest Preserve, and on the west by N. Loron. This is the

central area of Edgebrook and contains the small business district along Devon Avenue.

C. **Wildwood** — the area bounded on the northeast by the city limits, the southeast by N. Lightfoot, the southwest by Caldwell, and the northwest by N. Tonty.

D. **North Edgebrook** — the area in the northwest corner of Edgebrook, northwest of N. Tonty and bounded on three sides by the city limits.

E. **Edgebrook Towers** — the area north of N. Dowagiac and bounded on three sides by the city limits. This is the newest area in Edgebrook.

F. **Edgebrook Woods Property Owners Association**, commonly referred to as "South Edgebrook." It is bounded by the Chicago River on the north and Elston Ave. on the south — from C.M. St. Paul & P. Ry. to Devon and Indian Road.

As indicated on the map of Edgebrook, the area is divided into three areas according to the jurisdictions of the four community associations: Edgebrook Community Association, which covers approximately 1700 homes; Wildwood Community Association, 300 homes; North Edgebrook Civic Association, 750 homes, and Edgebrook Woods Property Owners Association (South Edgebrook) 200 homes.



The Devon
Business District

Edgebrook presently contains three elementary schools (two public, one parochial), a small storefront library, a fire station, six churches, two golf courses, a railroad station, a YMCA, three small parks, and a post office. The business district is centered primarily along three blocks of Devon Avenue and the intersections of Central and Caldwell Avenues. Most of the businesses are either old family businesses which have been in Edgebrook for decades, or small shops owned and managed by one or two owners. The only chain stores are Dominick's, Fannie May Candies and Baskin Robbins. There is one restaurant called Lockwood Castle, whose ice cream creations draw many northside residents, also a Coffee Shop, but there are no drive-in or chain restaurants. The business district is restricted primarily due to lack of parking facilities. There is one small parking lot for Dominick's; and one other behind Peterson's food store. The railroad does have some parking also for commuters and the Post Office for its patrons.

The lack of industry and business in Edgebrook means that most residents commute to work. The men in Edgebrook are primarily employed in professional and managerial capacities. The census figures for 1950 show 20.0% employed as professional and technical workers, and 22.8% employed as managers, officials and proprietors. Comparable statistics for Chicago show 8.9% employed in the first category and 8.7% in the second category.

The value of homes in the Edgebrook area is well above the median in Chicago. In 1967 when homes in Edgebrook Towers were first sold, the prices were \$50,000 and up. At year end 1973, the same homes are selling at \$65,000 and range up to \$120,000.

The Pre-history of Edgebrook

The land where Edgebrook now stands was originally inhabited by Indians. (See 1804 map of Indian Trails and Villages of Chicago). This was the hunting ground and home for the Potowatomi tribe. It is said that they numbered 5,000 at one time. In 1829 at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, the Potowatomis signed the fourth of the treaties that affected the Chicago area. Billy Caldwell, chief of the tribe, received 1600 acres north of the Indian Boundary Line, which

included the present Forest Glen and Edgebrook areas.

Billy Caldwell, whose Indian name was Sauganash, was a half-breed. His father was an Irish officer in the British army and his mother an attractive and intelligent woman of the Potowatomi. He received the land from the United States Government in recognition of his services as a mediator between the government and the Indians, also for saving the lives of the John Kinzie family after the Fort Dearborn Massacre in 1812. The area became known as the Caldwell Indian Reservation.

One of the Indian Boundary Line markers was a bent tree trunk at the intersection of what is now Rogers Avenue and Forest Glen Avenues. The tree has disintegrated, but a granite stone marks the location.

It was about 1829 that Sauganash came to Chicago to make this his home, and in 1826 was appointed the first Justice of Peace for Peoria County, to which Chicago then belonged. Sauganash also had become chief of the United Nation of Ottawa, Potowatomi and Chippewa Indians.

After the defeat of the Indians in the Black Hawk War in 1833, the Pottowattomies, among other tribes, were forced to cede to the United States all their lands west of Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River, and their land in southwest Michigan. The United States was supposed to pay for their transportation to the West, one year's support upon arrival, and spend another million dollars on their behalf. Billy Caldwell was rewarded again for his services in the making of the treaty by a life annuity of \$400 for himself and \$600 for his children, and a lump sum of \$5,000.

In 1836 all the Indians left the area along with Billy Caldwell, to their new reservation at Council Bluffs, Iowa, in accordance with the treaty they had signed.

A display of Indian artifacts including bows and arrows, utensils, implements, etc., that were found in Edgebrook area can be seen at the Billy Caldwell Post War Memorial Home at 6038 N. Cicero Avenue. The Indian village sites were found along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

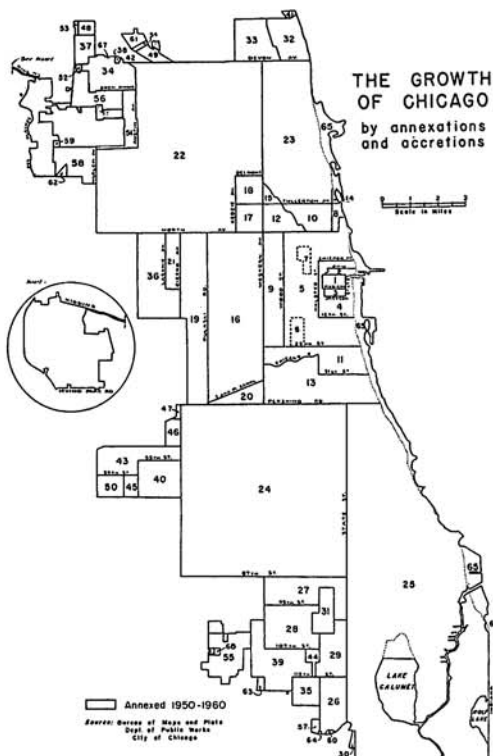
Billy Caldwell eventually sold parts of his land to various farmers. The area was pros-

perous farm country during the last half of the nineteenth century. At that time the area was accessible from downtown Chicago only by two toll roads: the Milwaukee Plank Road and the Elston Plank Road.

In 1872 the railroad line which runs from Western Avenue in Chicago through Edgebrook was constructed by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Co. of Illinois (which has become the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway Co. on November 21, 1927) with connection to the Union Station via Pennsylvania R.R. tracks. The railroad pur-

chased the land for the right-of-way through Edgebrook from May A. Hanson, Abel Kay, Theodore Schultz, Henry Adams, Dora Appleton, John Jenkins and the Town of Jefferson. At that time, the area south of Devon Avenue in present-day Edgebrook was part of the Caldwell Indian Reservation in the Town of Jefferson. On July 15, 1889 the Town of Jefferson was annexed to the City of Chicago by a vote of its residents, and what was soon to become the original section of Edgebrook became part of the City of Chicago. (See map of annexations to Chicago. Annexation #22).





Annexation #22

Early Beginnings: Edgebrook

In 1894 the land which is now known as Original Edgebrook belonged to Arthur and Annie Dixon. Arthur Dixon (1837–1917) was an early resident and later a well-known alderman of the city of Chicago. He came to the United States from Ireland in 1858 and arrived in Chicago shortly thereafter. Dixon was a prosperous businessman. Besides founding his own company, the Arthur Dixon Transfer Company, he was a director of several other companies in Chicago, among them the Grand Trunk Western Railway and the B. & O. Railroad. Dixon was elected alderman in 1867. As an alderman he advocated annexation of the suburbs and was influential in the Jefferson annexation. He retired from public life in 1891 and died in 1917. He is buried in Rosehill Cemetery, only a few miles east of Edgebrook. The street in Original Edgebrook which is now named N. Livermore was once named Dixon.

On October 29, 1894, shortly after his retirement, Arthur and Annie Dixon sold their land to the Title Guaranty and Trust Company for \$200,000, and the deed was recorded in the Recorder's Office on December 22, 1894. The deed gave the Title Guaranty and Trust Company the authority to improve, manage, operate, protect and to subdivide said premises until twenty-one years after the date of death of the survivor of the following men:

- Arthur Dixon, of Chicago, Illinois
- Jacob N. Barr, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Frank G. Bigelow, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Henry C. Payne, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Benjamin M. Weil, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

It appears that these men formed the Dixon Land Association which old residents of Edgebrook claim managed the land originally. According to a long-time resident of Edgebrook, Albert J. Earling was president of the Dixon Land Association. At the time that Edgebrook was settled, Earling was general manager and second vice-president of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway. On September 23, 1899, he became president of the railroad. Earling and Dixon had both served as directors of the Central Trust Company of Illinois, and were friends and business partners for forty years. Earling was an honorary pallbearer at Dixon's funeral, and in a letter written in memorial of Dixon, Earling mentions "my frequent associations with him in business affairs, large and small..." One of these business affairs was Edgebrook. The Dixon Land Association had direct contact with the railroad through Earling. Edgebrook was planned as a home for railroad officials. The railroad's interest in the Edgebrook development is crucial. The early residents of Edgebrook were reliant on the railroad to take them to work in the Loop each day. The only other method of transportation to the Loop was horse-and-buggy and that was not feasible for daily travel.

On February 16, 1895, Edgebrook was recorded as follows on the city plats, "Edgebrook, being a Sub. of parts of Lots 2, 3 & 4 of Billy Caldwell's Reserve in T. 40 and 41 N. R. 13 E." In August of 1895 the first family of Grant Williams', an official in the Traffic Dept. of the C. M. St. P. & P. Ry., moved into their



Edgebrook's 1st House, 6167 McClellan

new home in Edgebrook, which later became 6167 McClellan.

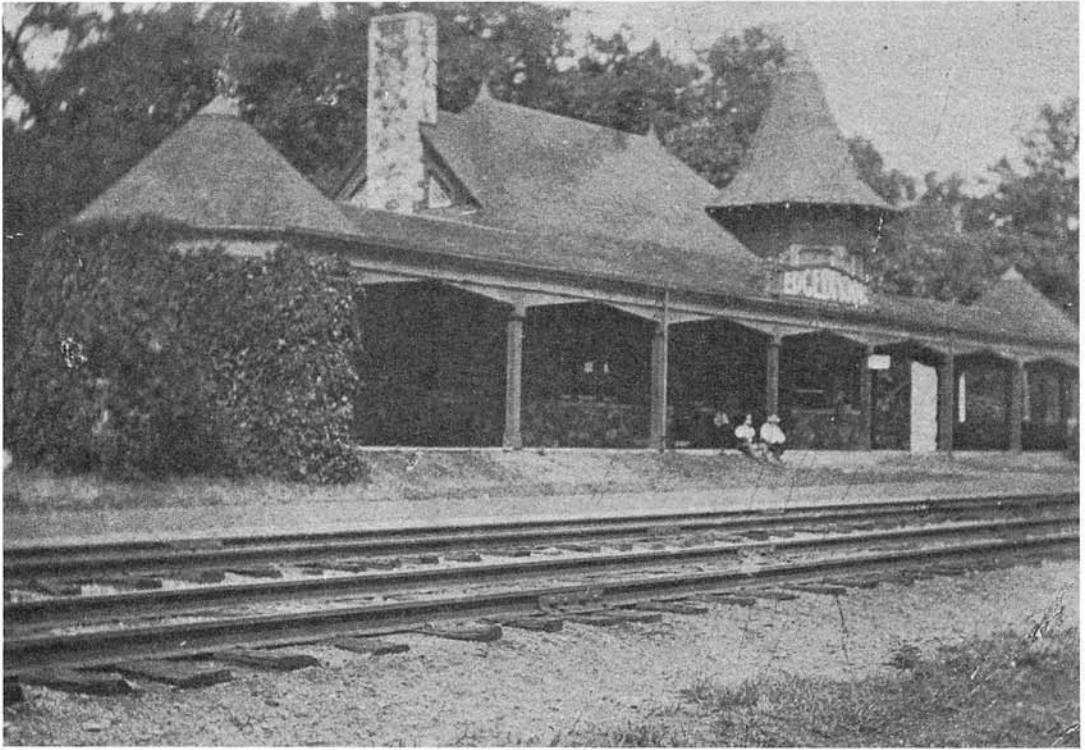
In November the second family, the William A. Linn's, moved into what would later become 6328 Louise Avenue. William Linn was then an Assistant in the Purchasing Dept. of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, later to become Purchasing Agent. He was one of nine employees of the railroad to erect a home in Original Edgebrook.

In 1896 a large, luxurious, stone and frame railroad station with washroom facilities and furnace in the basement, a large fireplace in the waiting room, and an apartment on the second floor for the agent was built by the Dixon Land Association for \$8,259, with a deed stipulating there must always be an agent on the premises. It was presented to the railroad. (See picture and floor plan). The railroad depot was the pride of the neighborhood. It was used for community meetings, parties and dancing, and the pagoda was used by youth for musicals. Since an agent was employed at the depot, the small community of Edgebrook was also provided with telegraph express and freight services. Tickets were sold there and through trains flagged when necessary.

The community grew quickly, and in 1897 the Chicago Blue Book listed sixteen families

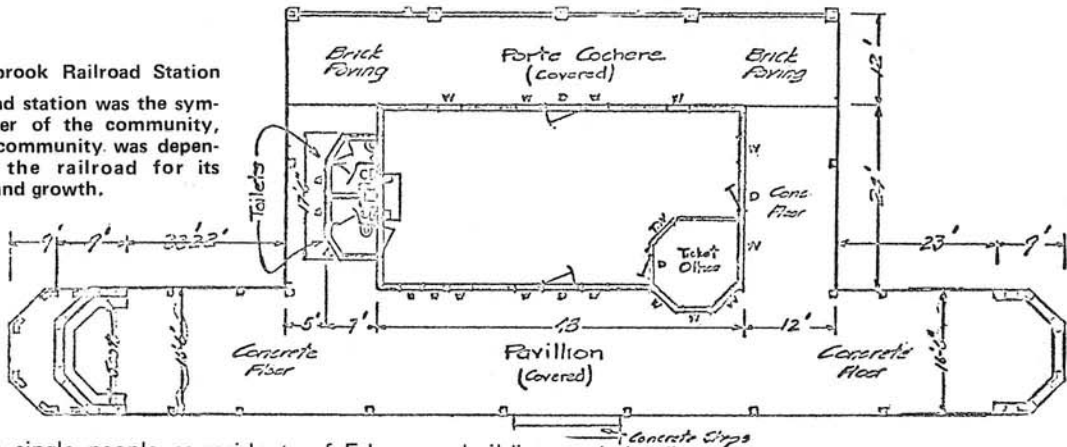


6328 Louise Avenue



The Edgebrook Railroad Station

The railroad station was the symbolic center of the community, since the community was dependent on the railroad for its existence and growth.



and seven single people as residents of Edgebrook. Curiously, although Edgebrook was officially part of the City of Chicago, it was listed as a suburb by the Chicago Blue Book, and continued to be so listed for several years.

On February 12, 1898 the cornerstone ceremonies were held for the Edgebrook School. The school stood near the railroad on what later became the corner of Central and Prescott. It was a modern two-story brick

building, and the first principal was Miss Cora E. Blake, one of the earliest residents of Edgebrook.

By the turn of the century Edgebrook was a small but slowly growing community. The residents were primarily employees of the railroad. The homes, the railroad station, the school and a small church were all that comprised the small community. The surrounding area was forest and farmland.

1900–1930: Original Edgebrook

During these thirty years, Edgebrook was centered around Original Edgebrook. It was still isolated and close-knit. Members of the community knew one another well. Besides homes, the only construction in Edgebrook during these thirty years was of a community church and a few small stores. The residents still worked in the Loop, and relied mainly on the railroad for transportation. When the automobile became common, some residents began to drive to work. At the end of this period bus service was inaugurated from the Loop to Edgebrook. By the end of this period, with the arrival of the car and bus transportation, the railroad began to lose its hold on Edgebrook.

The important events of this period are

related to the growth of formal organizations. As the community grew, formal organizations were instituted to replace the loosening network of informal ties. A group of neighbors could not collect now in someone's front room to discuss community affairs, and still represent the entire community. Now a community meeting had to be held at the clubhouse, and the larger meeting required organization. Through these organizations, the influential members of the community institutionalized their leadership. The founding of a community newspaper at the end of this period is also representative of the formalization of community ties taking place in this period. As the community expanded, the newspaper represented a formal means of communication among the larger populace.



The Edgebrook Club House



Edgebrook Club House (rear view)

Edgebrook's independence of Chicago should also be noted throughout this period. The only evidences of the city were the schoolhouse, the mail, and a few mounted police who patrolled the area. The city refused to be responsible for fires in Edgebrook because the roads of Elston and Central (then Carpenter Road) were too muddy. Accordingly, the city donated some fire-fighting equipment to Edgebrook, and the community formed its own volunteer fire company. The end of this period marks the end of Edgebrook's independence of Chicago. After 1930 Edgebrook begins to depend more and more heavily on city services.

The first decade of the twentieth century was a period of slow growth for Edgebrook. The land in Original Edgebrook was well settled, so newcomers to the community began to build homes outside of the original development.

By 1910 many of the families which would be prominent in Edgebrook affairs for the next thirty years or more had moved into Edgebrook. The 1912 Lakeside Directory lists the Ashenhursts, Beiersdorfs, Catlins, Deans, Gibbons, Nystroms, Wagners, and the Wittbold family. Some of these families, such as the Wagners and the Schuetts were primarily farmers. The Wittbolds, one of the wealthiest families to live in early Edgebrook, were florists, nurserymen and horticulturists. Their greenhouses and nursery were in Edgebrook and their florist shops were downtown in the Loop, in Evanston, and on Buckingham Place.

Edgebrook, having been established as a home for Railroad Officials included in its early residents: Mr. Simpson - General Passenger Agent, Mr. Grant William - Traffic Dept., Mr. Shaw - Operating Dept., Mr. Aeppli - Claim Dept., Mr. Cable - Train Dispatcher, Mr. William Linn - Purchasing Agent - all of the C. M. & St. P. Ry.

Each of these men were later prominent in Edgebrook affairs. Mr. Wally Peterson, who has owned a grocery store in Edgebrook for many years, characterized the early residents of Edgebrook as "... not exactly wealthy, but definitely in the upper bracket. . . . professional people. . . ."

The characteristics of the community were already evident at the early date. The residents'

concern about the neighborhood was displayed by their formation of the Edgebrook Improvement Association. The purpose of this organization was to find ways to improve the appearance of the community and cause their implementation. Other organizations were formed with the welfare of the community being at least part of their goals: the Edgebrook Garden Club, and the Edgebrook Women's Club. The Women's Club was organized in 1910 by Mrs. Otto Wittbold. Mrs. Helen (Wittbold) Dean, her daughter, is the only living charter member of the Women's Club, and still resides in Edgebrook.

The story of the origin of the Edgebrook Golf Course was written in 1928 by Fletcher Newell, an Edgebrook resident who started a small community newspaper in 1928. This is the story as Mr. Newell wrote it:

"Back in 1912 a group of Edgebrook men met one evening for the purposes of organizing a bowling club and to build the necessary bowling alleys. All went well; officers and committees were elected, the necessary funds subscribed, and the club seemed well on the road to success. However a snag was struck when the question of the location of the projected alleys came up. Finally it was suggested that the site chosen should be so located as to be available for the use of golfers should a golf club later be established in the community. It was the opinion of some of the individuals present that the locality would eventually have a golf course, and this view was reflected in the suggestion.

As a result of the suggestion the bowling club was forgotten and by one o'clock in the morning plans had been completed for the organization of the Edgebrook Golf Club. The Club was duly established, a private course opened, and for a decade it flourished. After ten years the club was taken over by the Forest Preserve District, the purchase price being divided between its eighty members, and it ceased to exist as a private enterprise."

The story is related here in its entirety to illustrate the conscious planning of Edgebrook by its early residents, which is also represented by the formation of the Edgebrook Improve-

ment Association. From the very beginning the residents of Edgebrook were concerned with what would become of the vacant land surrounding them. The use of the land for homes, farming, or recreational purposes was encouraged. The early residents of Edgebrook wished to maintain the country atmosphere of their community as much as possible.

The Edgebrook 18-Hole Golf Course was duly laid out by Maurice S. Dean and his son, Burt, and a big Clubhouse built entirely by the residents of Edgebrook. Shortly thereafter the Billy Caldwell Golf Course, a 9-hole course, was laid out by Chick Evans, a pro golfer, as a ladies' course. This course was also taken over by the Forest Preserve District. In the early twenties, a tornado ripped through Edgebrook, destroying the clubhouse which the residents had built on McClellan Avenue beside the Edgebrook Golf Course. At the request of the residents, the Forest Preserve District rebuilt the clubhouse exactly as it had been before, excepting the addition of an apartment on the second floor for the groundskeeper.

The first community church in Edgebrook was formed in 1924. Prior to that time services had been held in a small white church near the railroad station. Rev. Taylor, a Scotsman, was the minister, but he died and the community had been without a church for some time. In September of 1924 an insurance salesman named Brutus McGee was walking through Edgebrook and stopped to talk with Maurice Dean who was clipping his hedge. McGee asked whether there was a church in the community. When informed that there was no church in Edgebrook, McGee offered his services as a minister. He had been trained in a theological seminary, but had never had a congregation. Dean introduced him to other Edgebrook residents, and on October 8, 1924, an organizational meeting was held at the home of Otto Wittbold. At first, services were held in various homes in Original Edgebrook beginning in the home of Bert E. Denley on October 20, 1924. Services were later held in the homes of the Deans, the Evans, the Catlins, the Williams, and the Wittbolds.



Original Edgebrook: The Dean Home



The Edgebrook
Community Church
today

Soon the church outgrew the size of the members' homes, and services were held in the Edgebrook School. Early in 1925 Otto Wittbold donated a small frame one-story nursery foreman's cottage on the site of the present-day church. The Church members cleaned and readied the cottage for church services. The charter was signed in December, 1925, and includes 44 names, primarily those of the prominent and influential families in the community. The church was intended as a community church and welcomed every religion. In the early church twenty-one religious affiliations were represented. As a charter member of the church, Ada M. Evans, expressed it, "It was a community church because there were not enough of any denomination, and besides, laymen know few differences." It is significant that the church was organized on the basis of a community rather than on the basis of a particular religion. The community, the shared living experience, was the tie which bound the church members together, not a religious affiliation. On September 11, 1927, the cornerstone of the new church building was laid. The basement was completed in January, 1928, and was used for services until the upper level was built.

As the small community grew during the twenties, it was also being annexed to Chicago. During the decade of the twenties, the rest of

present-day Edgebrook was added to the City of Chicago. Edgebrook Manor was subdivided in 1922 and annexed to Chicago early in 1923. Wildwood was subdivided in 1919 and annexed in June, 1924. North Edgebrook was annexed on July 7, 1928. (See annexations #49, #54, and #61 on map). The building boom which hit Chicago in the early twenties barely touched Edgebrook. The distance from Chicago and the lack of mass transportation facilities are given as the reasons why expansion in Edgebrook was delayed until the latter part of the decade when the population began to increase dramatically. In 1928 one writer accorded Edgebrook "a place among the foremost of the city's outlying developments". But Edgebrook was still only sparsely settled in 1930.

In 1929 the *Edgebrook Events*, a small community newspaper was first published by the Edgebrook Community Church, with young Ashenhurst as Editor. His father, a former newspaper editor, took over the project and the Ashenhurst family continued to publish the *Events* for the next 34 years. The Ashenhursts printed strictly neighborhood news — meetings of local groups; church news; family events such as births, deaths, engagements, marriages, vacations, honors, and the like; advertisements for local businesses; and any other news which might affect the community. The *Edgebrook Events* was one of the strongest ties which

helped to bind the community together. It would later become an arm of the Edgebrook Community Association to be used to inform the community about community affairs.

An interesting story concerns the building of the home of the Ashenhursts at 6819 Algonquin Avenue, across from the Edgebrook Small Park in 1927. Their house was the first one built in Edgebrook Manor west of the railroad tracks. It is also said that it was presented to them by the Celotex Co., since it was an experimental venture, being the first Insulated House in the U.S. Although Harold Ashenhurst had invented house insulation using gypsum about 1916, he was not able to turn it over to the Celotex Co. for promotion until 10 years later. It is remarkable that now all well-built houses are insulated, so Mr. Ashenhurst's invention has proven exceptionally successful.

returned and destroyed the stone foundation. The last of the Edgebrook Station is recorded by the railroad as a large amount of stone rubble which was sold to a Dr. R. Van Pelt for \$25.00. A new frame depot was built by the railroad during the same year for \$993, and was located near the intersection of Devon, Caldwell and Lehigh, near the Edgebrook Manor subdivision. The burning of the railroad station marked the end of an era in Edgebrook. In 1939, a new elementary school was built to replace the original Edgebrook Public School, and it, too, was located in Edgebrook Manor. The shifting of the location of the railroad station and the school marked a change in the center of activity in Edgebrook from Original Edgebrook to Edgebrook Manor. The community was no longer centered around the rail-



The new Edgebrook Station

On May 12, 1930, the Edgebrook Station burned to the ground. As residents tell the story, the station was burned by people who wished to have the station moved closer to the Edgebrook Manor subdivision. After the fire the stone foundation still remained, and under pressure of the residents of Original Edgebrook the railroad agreed to rebuild the station on the old foundation. The next night the vandals

road. It was no longer strictly the home of the railroad employee. The new people moving into Edgebrook Manor were young families with children who were attracted by the suburban atmosphere. The center of Edgebrook now became Edgebrook Manor which symbolized the flight of the wealthier families from the city into a more healthy, clean atmosphere in which to raise their children.

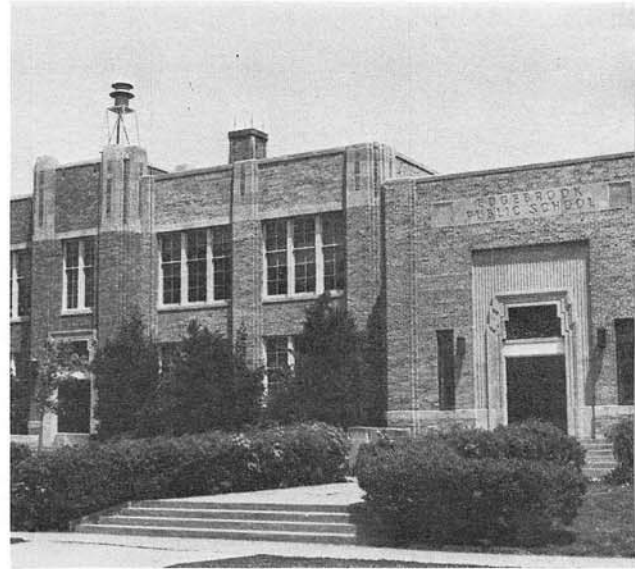
1930–1950: Edgebrook, Wildwood and North Edgebrook

The period between 1930 and 1950 were critical years for Edgebrook. These years marked the greatest growth period in Edgebrook's history. The population tripled during this era. These years were crucial ones in which to control the community's growth because the growth was so rapid and extensive. It was during this period that the community associations exercised their greatest influence both within the community and with the City of Chicago. During this period Edgebrook lost its isolation from Chicago, and began to use city services to a much greater extent.

During the Depression, construction of new homes stopped in Edgebrook. The W.P.A. built streets in Edgebrook Manor and Wildwood. During the late thirties several families bought land in Edgebrook, but waited to build until just prior to World War II. Sometime during the late thirties the Edgebrook Community Association was formed by residents of Edgebrook Manor. Its purpose, as stated in its constitution, is to "encourage a community spirit to promote a high standard of public morality, to concern itself with the condition of all public property, and the interests in general of the property owners." The thirties were brought to a close in September, 1939, with the opening of the new Edgebrook Public School.

In September 1940, Wally Peterson opened a small delicatessen and specialty shop on Devon Avenue. He describes Edgebrook then as a

small community of clean, friendly people of primarily Scandinavian and German extraction. He states that in 1940 the business district consisted of a Jewel grocery store, a drug store (still there), a hardware store, a bakery and a dry cleaners (still there), and a National Tea store. There was still much vacant land in Edgebrook and it was still considered to be the "country". Mr. Peterson says his biggest business day was Sunday when people came from all over the North Side to watch the "Hiawatha", a high speed train run by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railway, pass through Edgebrook.



Edgebrook Public School



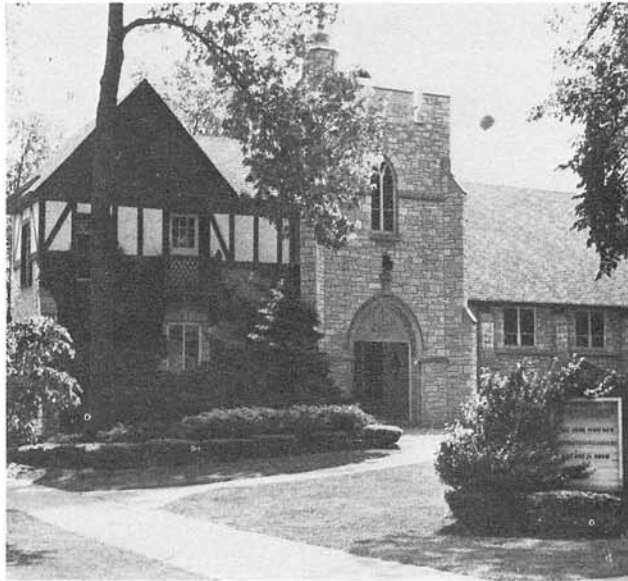
Peterson's Foods

The community's third church was formed in the fall of 1939 by 54 Edgebrook residents. The Edgebrook Evangelical Lutheran Church held its first services in March of 1940 at the Edgebrook Public School. The Lutherans began building their new church, and in the fall of 1943 they moved into their present building. This was the last church to be formed by Edgebrook residents alone. The rest of the churches to come to Edgebrook were churches who already had a congregation and were only relocating their church in a better area.

In the early forties North Edgebrook began to be developed. There were blocks of vacant land between North Edgebrook and the rest of Edgebrook. Consequently, the residents of North Edgebrook felt themselves quite separate and, decided to form their own community association. The North Edgebrook Civic Association was formed on January 15, 1941. When Wildwood began to develop, it also formed its own community association. During the forties there was some discussion regarding the merger of these two associations into the Edgebrook Community Association because their memberships were so small, but the merger never took place. South Edgebrook people in the Edgebrook Woods Property Owners Association also remained separate.

The rapid growth of Edgebrook during the forties caused a great deal of anxiety among the older residents. They became greatly concerned about what type of people and businesses were moving into the neighborhood. The residents did not like strangers of any kind in the neighborhood; in 1940 the Edgebrook Community Association discouraged housewives from buying from door-to-door peddlers, and almost requested the City Council to pass an ordinance prohibiting peddlers in Edgebrook. The residents were also concerned about the sale of liquor in Edgebrook. In February of 1941 a resolution was passed by several community groups expressing their determination to prevent any extension of the liquor business in Edgebrook.

In 1941 another church moved to Edgebrook, the Edgebrook Covenant Church. This church had originally been located in the Humboldt Park area of Chicago, where it had been established in 1884. Some of its members



Edgebrook Evangelical Lutheran Church



Edgebrook Covenant Church



Wildwood

were Edgebrook residents and they influenced the church's decision to move to Edgebrook. The chapel was built in 1941, but the sanctuary and the Sunday school were not finished until 1951. This was the first instance of a church moving to Edgebrook which already had a congregation of primarily non-Edgebrook residents. Edgebrook also gained an Episcopal Church on Devon Avenue. Edgebrook was slowly beginning to merge into Chicago. It was no longer a community isolated from the rest of the city. Its institutions were no longer made up entirely of Edgebrook residents. Edgebrook was becoming part of the larger metropolitan area.

The Edgebrook Community Association (ECA) exercised considerable influence over community affairs throughout the forties. The community was still small enough that it was possible for one to know a large percentage of his neighbors. The community still had an acute sense of identity, and most members of the community were very concerned with the nature of its growth. The community was still a viable body. The ECA held a monthly meeting (except during July and August) open to all members of the community. A Board of Direc-

tors, consisting of ten to fifteen men, met monthly just prior to the general meeting. This was the actual working body of the Association. The general meetings were held as social gatherings and in order to gain popular support for the Board's plans and resolutions. The general meetings usually featured a film or speaker and were generally well attended.

The Board of Directors was a group of hard-working individuals who kept in close contact with members of the community, public officials and businessmen between meetings. The ECA was constantly in contact with the aldermen for the district. Prior to 1947, they maintained close relations with Alderman Cowhey, a resident of Edgebrook and member of the E. C. A. In 1947 the ECA promoted the election of another of their own, Mr. Joseph Immel, as alderman, and he won. Thus the ECA had a very close line of communication to the city government. The Board members made it their business to know who the responsible officials were in areas which concerned Edgebrook, and they did not hesitate to write or contact these officials often in order to get something for the neighborhood. They felt they had every right to complain since they were homeowners, and the ECA knew it had the

support of the community. The minutes throughout the forties are evidence that they received prompt attention to their grievances. The main areas of concern in the forties were kiddie parks, the sale of liquor, business zoning on Devon, a library, an underpass at Hiawatha Avenue, new homes, rats, refuse collection, and condition of the streets. These projects are significant primarily because they are family-oriented. The parks, the library, and the underpass were for the children. The prohibition of the sale of liquor was desired to eliminate taverns and liquor stores and their attendant problems. Smaller projects like stop signs and speed limit signs usually received quite prompt attention by officials. The bigger projects took longer, but the ECA was generally successful.

The ECA began subsidizing the *Edgebrook Events* in 1939. The Ashenhursts were no longer willing to handle the large volume of papers needed, and had decided to quit publishing the paper. Prior to this time the paper had been self-sustaining, because the advertisements had paid for the paper. The ECA realized that the *Edgebrook Events* was an invaluable part of the community and they persuaded Mr. Ashen-

hurst to continue publishing with their subsidy, which he did until late 1963.

Besides its role as a community improvement organization, the ECA also functioned as a social organization. In addition to the monthly meetings, the Association sponsored various parties throughout the year. The traditional parties were a Fourth of July Celebration, a Fall Festival and a Christmas party for children of members of the Association. Much of the organization's time was spent planning and evaluating these events.

The condition of the streets was a continual problem. Many of the streets were constructed during the "W.P.A." area with stone and black top with 18 foot widths. Since by this time the community relied primarily on the automobile for transportation, the condition of the streets was important to residents. At almost every meeting holes were reported to be repaired. The city spread cinders on shoulders of the streets, when available, upon request. The Board was constantly calling the alderman to ask for more cinders or to have the street crews sent out to do repair work. During the fall and spring mud was the primary problem. During the winter the



North Edgebrook

request was always for more snowplowing. In the early days when the E.C.A.'s predecessor — The Edgebrook Improvement Association was operating, roads and sidewalks were faithfully plowed. The community had its own wooden plow — Mike Proesl, brother of the present Mayor of Lincolnwood did the plowing. Despite the poor condition of the streets, the homeowners in the community did not want to face the high assessments to have the streets paved. Since the city stopped using coal, and cinders became unavailable, the streets have remained a continual concern. The street problem was and is important because it is one of the strongest links between the community association and the city.

Rats were another major problem for Edgebrook. The open fields and the uncollected garbage cans in the alleys behind the grocery stores were the breeding grounds for hundreds of rats. The ECA continually reminded the businessmen to have their garbage collected or keep it tightly closed. When a private homeowner was reported as leaving his garbage out in the open, a delegate from the Board would go discuss the matter with the homeowner "in the interest of the general community". By 1950 the problem is no longer referred to in the minutes or the newspapers.

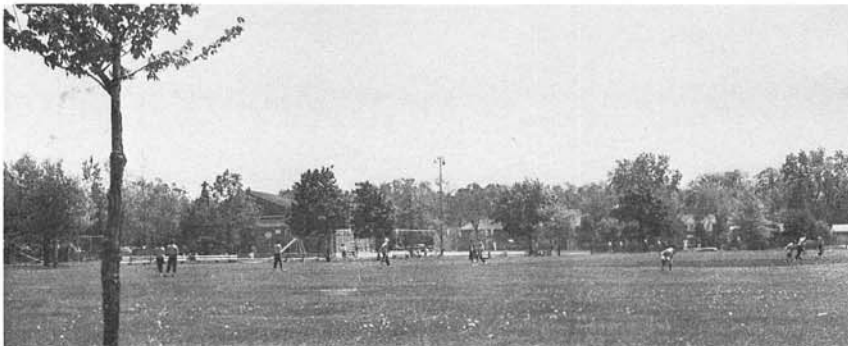
Beginning in 1940 the Association began to petition the railroad to build an underpass at Hiawatha Avenue so that the children living east of the railroad could walk to school in greater safety. This came to fruition in 1943. Five years later, in 1948, the six-acre Wildwood Park was established near the Wildwood school.

The end of the war brought a new wave of construction to Edgebrook. The residents grew

fearful that the new homes would not uphold the same high standards as the older homes in the neighborhood. In March, 1945, members of the ECA were appointed as Sectional Representatives to police each area of Edgebrook and contact any new builders. On April 3, 1945, the president of the ECA asked the members of the Association to:

"...keep the officers posted as to any contemplated building projects in the Edgebrook area. In view of the possibility of the erection of low cost homes in Edgebrook by War Veterans, such information would enable the Ass'n. executives to contact anyone building a home and to point out to the individual, the desirability of constructing a home in keeping with other homes in the area."

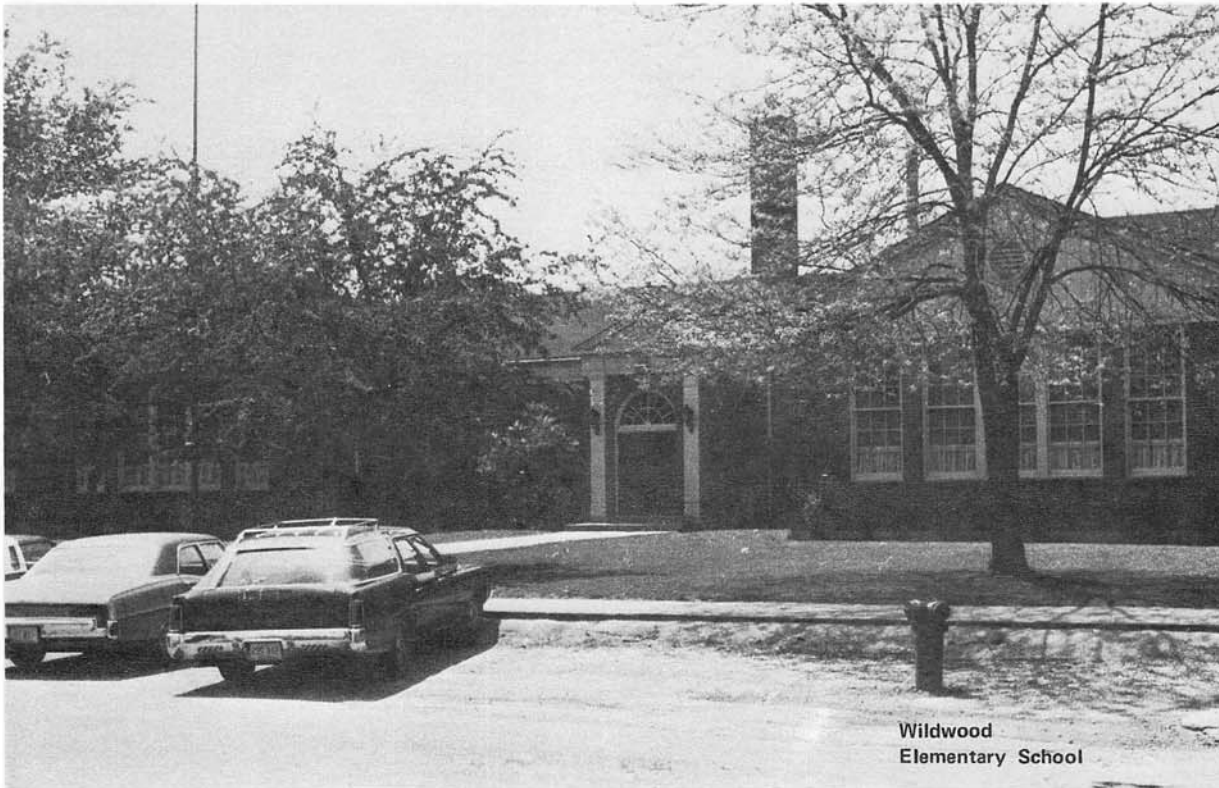
Other changes came to Edgebrook after World War II. In 1940 Rev. David E. Todd had succeeded Brutus McGee as pastor of the Edgebrook Community Church. Under his ministry the Community Church joined the Congregational and Christian Fellowship of Churches and became a United Church of Christ in April, 1946. The benefits which accrued from this change were listed as (1) an Assistant Minister was provided, (2) the young people of the church could participate in youth conferences, and (3) the church received substantial funds as grants and loans to build the church. The last benefit was used almost immediately. On May 18, 1947, the cornerstone of the new Church was laid by Rev. Todd. The church was no longer completely reliant on the community for support, but had become part of a larger, extra-community organization.



Wildwood Park



Edgebrook Streets



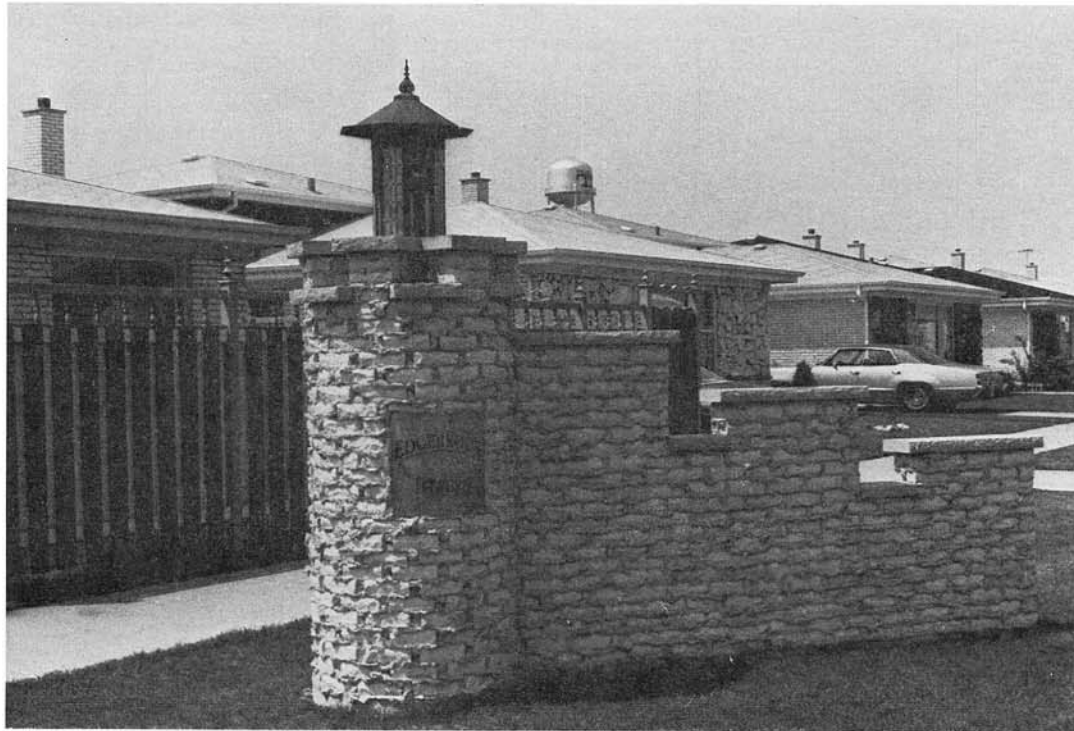
**Wildwood
Elementary School**

Illustrative of the determination and control of the community organizations is the fight against the sale of liquor in Edgebrook. Edgebrook residents wanted no further extension of business of any sort in the area. During the forties the ECA used its influence to have several areas of Edgebrook rezoned from commercial to residential zoning. The Edgebrook homeowners wished to have the business district confined to the area along Devon, Caldwell and Central. Since 1940 the community had openly discouraged further liquor stores and taverns in Edgebrook. In 1945 it became an issue when attempts were made to open new liquor stores in Edgebrook. The Association and its allied community groups resolved to put the issue on the next election ballot, and the local option against the sale of liquor in Edgebrook passed on April 1, 1947. The option is still in effect at the present time.

Edgebrook was not only successful in keeping undesirable elements out of their commu-

nity. They were also successful during the forties in achieving constructive improvement in their community. One of the community's longest-awaited dreams came true on July 21, 1947 when the Edgebrook Branch Library opened its doors boasting a collection of 3200 volumes, and run by the community's first librarian, Miss Elizabeth Viezer. All four community associations, the Women's Club, and the P.T. A. had pushed for a branch library since prior to the end of the Second World War. The main problem in locating a library in Edgebrook had been to find a suitable building to house it. The City of Chicago did not wish to construct one, so the library settled into a storefront on Devon Ave. west of Lehigh and then moved to Central Avenue near the Edgebrook Elementary School. In May, 1973, a new and larger store was leased on Devon Ave., east of the R.R. tracks.

The end of the forties brought another innovation to Edgebrook; electric street lights



Edgebrook Towers Gates

were installed during the period 1947-48. Prior to that time the streets were lighted by gas lamps, and Edgebrook's lamplighter was one of the last of his kind in Chicago. The Edgebrook residents had fought against electric lights for many years, preferring the charm of the gas lamps — they helped to give the neighborhood a separate identity. But the rise of crime during the forties caused a demand for better police protection and more well-lighted streets. The feeling that modernization was inevitable also persuaded some residents to accept electric lighting. Newer residents to the community were not attached to the old lamps, and welcomed the better lighting. The lamps have been immortalized by two gas lamps which adorn the gates to the Edgebrook Towers development. Herbert Muehl, one of the original residents in the new Edgebrook Towers section and a vice president of the ECA went to considerable trouble to have a special gas line constructed to feed into these two lamps. The City of Chicago had to approve at a full council meeting, this exception of construction on a city parkway. The Towers residents themselves pay for the gas and upkeep.

In 1948 the Greater Caldwell Council was formed which represented Edgebrook and the surrounding communities, and worked on problems of general interest to the entire area. The Greater Caldwell Council institutionalized the cooperation which had been practiced for many years by the neighboring community groups. In the late forties the Council was primarily involved in the location of the Edens Expressway and pollution of the Chicago River.

On May 2, 1950, another era passed as the Edgebrook Improvement Association was dissolved and its treasury was donated to the Edgebrook Community Association. For several years many residents of Original Edgebrook had belonged to both organizations. Now, as the community had doubled in size in a decade, the residents of Original Edgebrook realized that they no longer held the reins of authority in the community. They realized that the time had passed where their small organization could effect change in Edgebrook. To accomplish needed changes a larger, more powerful organization was necessary.

1950-1963: Growth and Change

The fifties began on a high note for Edgebrook. Several community projects came to fruition in the first two years of the decade. In mid-1950 the Devon Avenue Parkway was completed by the ECA. When Devon Avenue was laid out, a median strip of land was left vacant in the event of a street car line at a later date. No street car line was ever built, and the median strip became an unsightly strip of mud where people dumped rubbish. In 1950 the median strip was landscaped and planted with trees and bushes by members of the community. The ECA paid a man to care for the parkway until the early sixties when the City of Chicago assumed responsibility for the median strip. This is another instance of the community's greater dependence on the city for services. In September, 1951, the ECA built a bus shelter at Caldwell and Central, the turnaround stop for the Peterson Caldwell Bus. Also, in 1951, the Wildwood School was expanded to eight grades. Five classrooms, a kindergarten room, and a gym were added to the school. This addition to the Wildwood School eased the overcrowded conditions at the Edgebrook School by the transfer of the Wildwood area upper-class students to the Wildwood School.

Until 1953, the Catholic members of the community attended the Queen of All Saints Basilica Church in Sauganash, and their children attended the parish school. Then, during the winter of 1951, the weather was so severe that the children missed a substantial number of school days because the buses could not run in the snow. The Edgebrook residents began to press the archdiocese to build a new church in Edgebrook. Early in 1952 the archdiocese purchased the property at 7000 Moselle in North Edgebrook as the site of the future church, to be known as St. Mary of the Woods. On July 5, 1952, an informal gathering of parishioners was held in the yard of the property to meet their new Priest, Father Daniel B. O'Rourke. An Edgebrook resident offered a store at 6141 Touhy as a temporary church. Two other parishioners, Michael Gaul and John Voosen, offered to donate their skills as architects to build the church. Another Edgebrook resident, Louis Slezak, served as

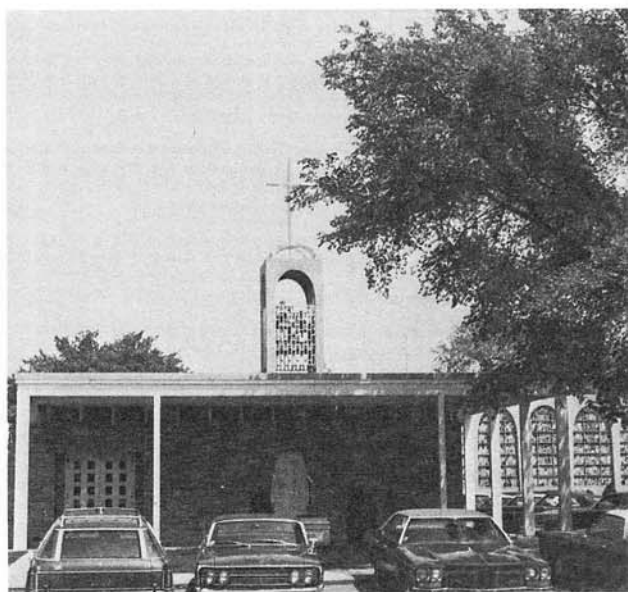


Devon Median Strip

general contractor. A fourth resident, Joseph Valenti, offered a home at 7114 Nagle as temporary lodgings for the Sisters who would teach at the new school. One is reminded of the origins of the Edgebrook Community Church. But here the church was not founded on the basis of community, but on a religious basis. These people were drawn together not by their community interest, but by their shared religious affiliation.

Nine Sisters from the Third Order of St. Francis of the Holy Family arrived on August 14, 1953. They opened the school on September 14, with 310 pupils. On October 11, 1953, the cornerstone of the chapel was laid, and the first Mass was held in the basement on November 8. On December 2, 1953, the Sisters were moved into their new convent, and midnight, Christmas Eve, the first Mass was said in the new church. In 1966, St. Mary's was enlarged and redecorated. Today the school consists of 9 Sisters, 8 grades, 17 classrooms and 600 students. The school and church have attracted many new Catholic families to Edgebrook. For the September, 1973 enrollment, St. Mary of the Woods School was the only Catholic school to have an increased enrollment in the entire city of Chicago. Father O'Rourke, now Monsignor O'Rourke, in 20 years has seen his congregation take it's place in the community.

St. Mary of the Woods



The year 1953 brought another church to Edgebrook. The Lakeview Evangelical Free Church had been founded in 1892 in a downtown location. In 1953 the congregation began to look for a new home. Edgebrook residents in the congregation proposed a new location in Edgebrook. They began building the new church in 1953, and the first services were held in Edgebrook the following year. In 1954 the church's name was changed to the Edgebrook Evangelical Free Church.

The growth of the community in the early 1950's was tremendous, but construction slowed after 1955. In 1955 it was reported that the land in Edgebrook was 98% developed. The Edgebrook Community Church Broadcaster reported in 1958 that "whereas the community was increasing at the rate of approximately 300 families per year, the rate has tapered off to 50 new families in 1955, 100 in 1956 and 75 in 1957."



Edgebrook Evangelical Free Church

Throughout the fifties, the primary concern of the community associations was building violations. The entire Edgebrook area was zoned for single family residences, excepting a few blocks adjacent to Devon Ave., and there were constant complaints against residents who attempted to convert their homes into duplexes. Building permits were published in the *Events* so that members of the community could keep watch over their neighbors and report violations to the community associations. Other builders came into the community hoping to build duplexes or apartments, and each of these attempts was fought successfully by the community associations.

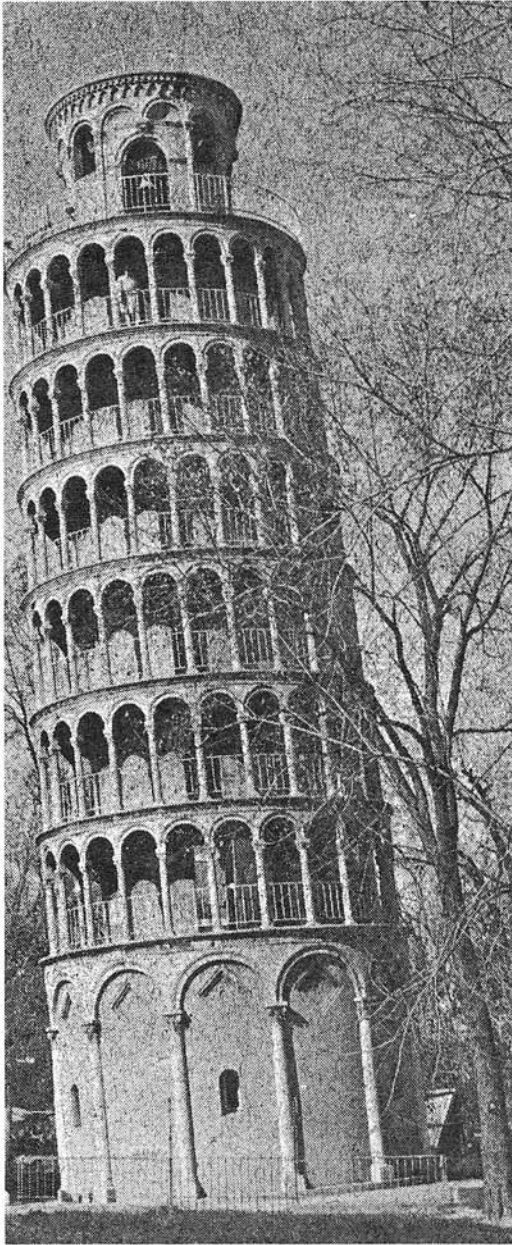
In 1958, the Edgebrook Station of the Chicago Post Office was opened with much fanfare on Kinzoa Avenue, just north of Devon. A post office was sought for the area by the ECA for some years. Much of the credit for this achievement must be given Jerome Williamson, a post office official and past president of the ECA.

During the year of 1958, the various community groups began a movement to elevate or depress the Milwaukee Road tracks between Elston Avenue and Dempster Street. Surveys were made by various governmental agencies as to the feasibility of the project. After several years of hearings and conferences the project was dropped because of the prohibitive costs. The installation of the complex traffic light system at the rail crossings, a few years later, alleviated the problem to a great extent.

The basis for a major community improvement was laid in 1958 when millionaire Robert A. Ilg gave 4½ acres in North Edgebrook to the YMCA for the construction of the Leaning Tower YMCA. Ilg had purchased the land in the early 1920's to build Ilgair Park, a recreational park for his family and friends, and later the general public. He build the Leaning Tower in 1934, a half-size replica of the original in Pisa, to hold water for his swimming pools. Ilg gave the land to the YMCA on the condition that they would not tear down the tower. In 1966 the YMCA building was completed and opened, and soon became much frequented by Edgebrook residents.

On February 3, 1962, Mrs. Ashenhurst died and her son, James, continued the publication

of the *Edgebrook Events*. He made one immediate change — mailing the *Events* rather than having them delivered. But James Ashenhurst was not able to continue publication, so in late 1963 he sold the *Events* to Alderman, Edward T. Scholl. Scholl continued to publish the newspaper for a few years.



Leaning Tower of Pisa, Niles, Illinois

1963—1970: Edgebrook Towers

The Edgebrook Towers land was the last land to be developed in Edgebrook. The fight to keep the land from being zoned for apartments is characteristic of the community's desire to keep the community solely a single-family residence area.

Prior to 1954 the Loyola tract of land was part of Skokie. The residents of Edgebrook were concerned about the development of the land because it bordered on their community. As early as 1952 the records indicate concern with possible industrial rezoning of the area. In the early fifties, Loyola University offered to buy the land to build a hospital and medical school if the property could be annexed to Chicago. The property was annexed on May 21, 1954 (see annexation #75). The Edgebrook residents soon learned about Loyola's plans, and they did not register any discontent. But for the next six years Loyola made no definite moves to develop the property. Eventually they were given land by the Federal government to build a hospital in Maywood and they abandoned the plans to build in Edgebrook.

In 1961, the Edgebrook Community Association discovered that Loyola was not planning to build on the Edgebrook land. The ECA had kept track of developments in regard to the Loyola property, and they became concerned as to what would now become of the property. The property was zoned for single-family residences and the Edgebrook community intended that it should remain so zoned.

In October, 1964, the president of the ECA, Mr. William M. Gibbons, informed the Association that he had learned that Loyola had signed a contract with Metropolitan Structures, Inc., to sell the Loyola property on the condition that the property be rezoned for multiple-unit dwellings. Metropolitan structures intended to build 1500 apartment units, in buildings that were to be 3½ and 4½ stories tall. The broker involved was a client of Mr. Gibbons, so Gibbons resigned his presidency to prevent a conflict of interest. The Association immediately went on record opposing the rezoning and resolved to fight the proposed apartment plans.

The community was advised of the proposed rezoning, and strongly urged to support the

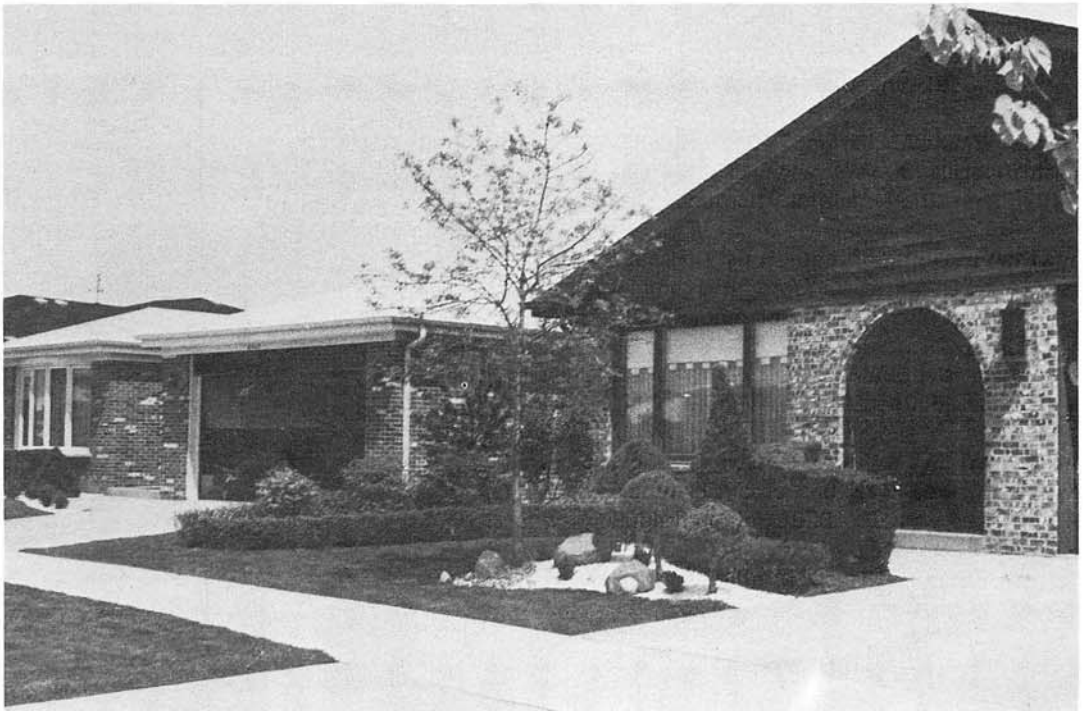
community associations, aldermen, and local communities who were opposing the change. All the community associations, Alderman Scholl, and the Villages of Skokie and Lincolnwood grouped their efforts to fight Loyola and Metropolitan Structures. An attorney, Louis Ancel, was hired, and neighborhood meetings were held to plan protests and write letters to the city officials. On February 4, 1965, the first rezoning hearing was held in City Hall. Four hundred Edgebrook residents attended the hearing. Action was deferred for a month, but the city ruled in Edgebrook's favor and the rezoning was denied.

Edgebrook's reasons to oppose the rezoning were enumerated by Gerald Cuny in the *Edgebrook Events*, starting with the dire phrase:

"Defend Edgebrook or let it be destroyed!... If the average home in Edgebrook is now worth \$30,000 this would mean a loss in value of from \$3,000 to \$4,500. Why? 1) Because of the deteriorating effect the addi-

tion of only about 1,450 units or households (all Edgebrook has about 2,300 households) would have on our schools, churches, traffic, sewers, streets, and other facilities. 2) Because a zoning variation for the Loyola Tract would open the gate for variations in any other part of Edgebrook. 3) Because apartment dwellers are notoriously uninterested in the welfare of the community they reside in. 4) Because Edgebrook is a singularly distinguished community for the very reason that it is the only remaining single residence area in the City of Chicago. Its attractiveness is rooted largely on this fact. This is why we bought homes in Edgebrook."

Mr. Cuny was not exaggerating either the anxiety felt by the residents or the gravity of the danger to Edgebrook. The proposed apartments would have doubled the population of Edgebrook, brought in a different class of residents, and eventually would have completely obliterated the small community atmosphere. Edgebrook residents were asked to each



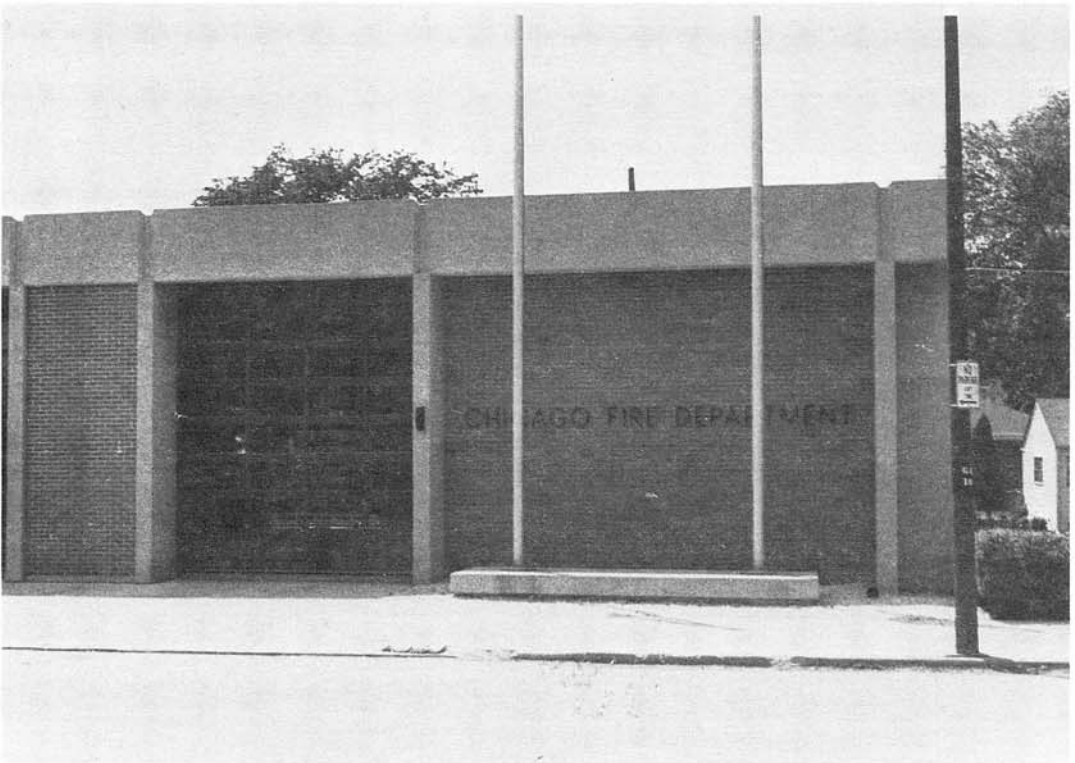
Edgebrook Towers

contribute \$10 to the campaign, and over \$10,000 was eventually raised for legal expenses. In October, Loyola again asked to have the property rezoned, but this time they only asked to have the zoning changed so that the new developer could plan slightly smaller lots for single-family residences. The houses were built in 1966 and 1967, and the first families began to move in during late 1967 and 1968.

After the Loyola dispute the latter part of the sixties seemed rather quiet. In 1965 and 1966 the community tried to influence the decision whether or not to retain Dr. Willis as Superintendent of Schools. The community solidly backed Supt. Willis, but to no avail. In May, 1965, the *Weekly Reporter*, began publishing, and included Edgebrook in the list of communities whose news it covers. But since it serves the whole surrounding area, it devotes little space to Edgebrook news. At the present time the *Reporter* is the only local newspaper in Edgebrook. In 1966, the ECA began the

snowplowing of the residential streets to supplement the city's inadequate service. The ECA hires and pays its own snowplowers.

The year 1970 brought the latest addition to the Edgebrook community — a fire station. When the City had assumed control of fire department services, it did not build a station in Edgebrook. There were constant complaints about the fire department's service because the firemen were unable to locate Edgebrook addresses. Most of Edgebrook's streets are laid on a diagonal, using as a base the Indian Boundary Line on Rogers Ave. in Sauganash; consequently the numbers do not conform exactly to the rest of Chicago. If the railroad station is symbolic of early Edgebrook because it brought people to settle in Edgebrook and caused the development of the community, then the fire station is symbolic of the community's current concern with preservation and protection of what it has created.



Edgebrook Fire Station

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Past Presidents of
Edgebrook Community Association



1940—GEORGE A. TREFELNER
1941—FERDINAND SAIGER
1942—WALTER N. SAABY
1943—FRANK J. SMITH
1944—ARTHUR P. MURRAY
1945—DONALD D. MAGERS
1946—DONALD D. MAGERS
1947—JOSEPH E. NEWTON
1948—WILLIAM M. HADDOW
1949—ROBERT D. LENTH
1950—LEONARD R. STENSLAND
1951—WALTER J. MATTICK
1952—ELMER A. TERWELL
1953—WM. P. HEUEL
1954—STANLEY R. PULASKI
1955—ROBERT H. MOURAD
1956—ERVIN F. BAUR
1957—JEROME WILLIAMSON
1958—EDWIN M. LAKE
1959—MILTON P. CHRISTENSEN
1960—MILTON P. CHRISTENSEN
1961—WM. P. HEUEL
1962—PAUL W. SCHNEIDER
1963—JOSEPH A. McERLEAN
1964—WILLIAM M. GIBBONS
1965—LEO J. DURANTE
1966—LEO J. DURANTE
1967—RUSSELL H. MOLINE
1968—JOHN J. O'BRIEN
1969—JAMES L. QUINN
1970—JAMES L. QUINN
1971—JOHN R. O'BRYAN
1972—HANS G. PIERCE
1973—ROBERT T. MULCAHY
1974—ROBERT T. MULCAHY

There is one common theme that is apparent throughout this history of Edgebrook. The people living here have themselves worked and planned to keep the community one of a residential character. The proven effective method has consistently been through their community associations. The officers of these associations spend many hours and days of each year in keeping Edgebrook the finest area in Chicago to have a home. Zoning variation requests are almost always a problem that requires constant vigilance. Even when on the surface all appears to be okay most cases prove otherwise. When a variance is granted it sets a precedent. This has happened in virtually every other area of Chicago. Your associations are working on several such petitions as of this writing. If you do not have the time or inclination to be an active member, at least be a dues paying, interested resident. In this memoir, we trust that when a supplement is added to this history in 25 years, it can still be said "Edgebrook is the finest residential area in Chicago".