

Why does a community attempt to renovate historic buildings?

One reason is because older community members want to preserve their history and let their legacy live on for future generations. With the construction of new and modern buildings that many communities invest in today, there has been less attention spent on saving older, historic buildings. One reason for this is the cost of renovating a structure, and another is the difficulty of meeting new safety codes. Many of the historic buildings from long ago were built with masonry, not only because it was the material of choice at the time, but because its structural integrity and mass has allowed it to weather the elements through decades, and in some cases, over a century.

Historically, Park Ridge IL was first known as Pennyville, in 1856, then soon became Brickton, until 1873. It was originally a very small town that had a successful brickyard where George Penny and Robert Meacham manufactured clay brick. The Brickton brickyard was instrumental in providing brick to neighboring communities as their populations grew, and it also provided bricks to rebuild Chicago after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. This rebuilding under stringent fire codes meant a surge in brick demand. The town prospered from these brick sales and established itself as a thriving community where people lived and worked, and it quickly grew into a noteworthy suburb of metropolitan Chicago.

Historic masonry building tells a story from long ago

One historic area in town was The Illinois Industrial School for Girls, which relocated from Evanston to Park Ridge in 1908. The School consisted of a series of eight 1908—1914 era brick cottages built to house and educate dependent and destitute young girls. Six of these masonry buildings were designed by renowned architects Holabird and Roche, who were architects of other prominent Chicago buildings such as Soldier Field and the Chicago City Hall/Cook County Building. The architects chose a Colonial Revival/Georgian Revival style for these buildings which includes many details such as: decorative pediments and supported pilasters, doors with overhead fanlights or sidelights, symmetrically balanced windows, concrete bars installed inside on the ceiling for structural support, and original cove work at the ceiling. The masonry exterior incorporates interesting brick patterns that were considered decorative and unique for the period.



The Solomon Cottage, built in 1908 is on the National Registry of Historic Buildings. It is located at 721 N Prospect Ave, Park Ridge, IL 60068 (847) 696-1973

Advocating for Historic Landmark Preservation

Park Ridge preservation advocates, such as the Park Ridge Historical Society's President Kirke Machon, will be preserving one of these masonry school buildings thanks to a cooperative venture, and 50 year lease, with the Park Ridge Park District. The cost of renovating the Cottage will be shared between the District and the Historical Society, with the Society funding the major share of the work. The Solomon Cottage, built in 1908, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 and is named after Hannah Solomon, who was President of the School when it relocated from Evanston to Park Ridge. By 1990 the school was known as The Youth Campus, and still carried on the original mission from 1908 to provide aid to children in need. The Youth Campus in Park Ridge closed its doors in 2012 and only three of the original buildings remain. Today the area is named Prospect Park, and is the new home for Park District offices, a waterpark, a community center, and ball fields, and the remaining three original school buildings.



Gary Porter of the Masonry Advisory Council (also located in Park Ridge) met with Kirke Machon, President of the Park Ridge Historical Society, at the 1908 Solomon Cottage to discuss the renovation currently taking place.

They determined that most of the lintels are rusted and in need of replacement. Plus, there is no evidence that the building was constructed with weep holes or drainage and moisture ventilation that would be found in a modern masonry building. This is a testament to durable masonry materials!

Masonry construction helps to meet current code specifications

The Solomon Cottage has solid brick exterior walls, concrete floors, a couple of internal concrete beams, and pyro block interior walls. Although it is still structurally sound, it needs to be updated with new heating and cooling systems, electrical work, and masonry tuckpointing. Many years ago, prior to The Historical Society entering into a long-term lease for the Cottage, thanks to the Park Ridge Park District, there had been some questionable tuckpointing work done on the exterior masonry walls, which now detracts from the original look of the cottage.

Mr. Porter offered suggestions on how to repair some masonry sections, brought attention to water prone areas that could cause moisture problems down the road, and provided tips on how to meet code specifications for renovating historic buildings.



Pyrobar walls were used in the early 1900's

Pyrobar (and pyro block) are gypsum-based products. The pyrobar is the red board found between the walls and was used in the construction of schools, commercial buildings, hospitals, apartment buildings and residential properties between 1903 and the 1960s. Pyrobar was a fire-resistant material that was made into light-weight blocks that were secured together by mortar and then stacked upon one another, making it a fast and easy way to create wall-like constructions. Pyrobar materials were long ago replaced by concrete masonry unit walls.



Colored mortar of the era

The rear exterior wall shows the original mortar color and original tooled joint finish of the era. Mr. Machon commented that the existing tuckpointing does not match the style or color of the original building.



Solomon Cottage has a substantial stone band that transitions the masonry back 4" at the level of the concrete Cottage floor, which measures 8" thick. There are brick quoin corners and running bond jack arch headers over the windows. The exterior brick work featured shadow lines, dentils and jack arches with red tinged mortar and raked joints, and is in good condition after 108 years.



Wohler's Hall, a newly built administration building for the Park Ridge Park District, on the grounds of Prospect Park looking Northeast from inside the rear of the Solomon Cottage, which is soon to be the Park Ridge History Center.

Mr. Machon further stated that although interior renovations have begun, fundraising is still underway and more funds will be needed to complete the project, especially if it is to include the restoration of the brick exterior. He wonders if there might be any firms in the masonry construction industry who might be willing to offer their assistance in re-tuck pointing the masonry to its original color and mortar type.

Mr. Porter is interested in this project because of Park Ridge's long history with brick and masonry. Once the Historical Society's History Center is open to the public (estimated to be fall of 2017) we hope that people from all communities will visit the center to see this building renovation and discover other interesting stories from Park Ridge history such as The Art Colony, The Pickwick Theater, WWII war time memories, and some of the architect designed masonry homes and businesses that still stand today. Click here for more information on the [Park Ridge Historical Society](http://ParkRidgeHistoricalSociety.org).

If you need free professional advice about your masonry project contact Gary Porter at the Masonry Advisory Council at 847-297-6704 or visit their website at masonryadvisorycouncil.org.



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