



## Heritage Building Plaque Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Building Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Building Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(for public/commercial structures only)  
Current Owner \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

If different than above:

Applicant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Original Owner \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Construction \_\_\_\_\_  
Architect (if known) \_\_\_\_\_  
Builder (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach the following information:

1. Statement of Value: This statement should include a narrative description of the historical and architectural value of the building.
2. Photocopies of relevant research materials including but not limited to, Sanborn Maps, City Directories and original property deeds. See page 3 of the program guidelines for research locations.
3. Building Alterations: List any alterations to the exterior of the building. Attach copies of all building permit applications.
4. Photographs: Include a recent photograph in which the building is clearly visible. Additional photographs depicting close-up details of decorative features are helpful.

*An example plaque nomination is attached.*

### Stipulations

If the building is not awarded a plaque, the application fee of \$60 will be refunded.

This application and submitted materials shall be retained by the City of Elgin as a part of the permanent record of the building.

The Elgin Heritage Commission has the authority to edit and publish the information submitted in the application. This does not prohibit others from using the information.

When awarded, the plaque will remain with the building and should not be altered or removed from the building. It is the City's responsibility to replace the plaque if or when the situation warrants it.

In addition to the above stipulations, the undersigned attests that the information provided is, to the best of his/her knowledge, accurate.

Owner's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Elgin Heritage Commission's Building Plaque Program:

For Past, Present and Future Generations

## Overview

The purpose of the Elgin Heritage Commission's Building Plaque Program is to identify and promote awareness and appreciation of those buildings in Elgin which have historical and/or architectural value.

The Building plaque program is indicative of the pride Elgin has in its past and its desire to preserve history for future generations. Under the auspices of the Elgin Heritage Commission, the program was created in 1985 in celebration of Elgin's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of settlement.

Any owner of a residential, commercial, institutional, religious, educational or industrial building may apply for a plaque. After the owner has completed the research, submitted the application and paid the fee, the Elgin Heritage Commission will review the application. If the application is accepted, the property owner is notified by mail and the letter will confirm the wording on the plaque. The plaque and a certificate will be presented to the property owner at a special ceremony held twice a year. If your building does not qualify for a plaque, a letter will be sent requesting additional information or the application fee will be refunded.

Whether you are spurred on by natural curiosity, or are seeking information for a restoration project, you may find that unique stories about your building will unfold as you begin your research. Working in concert with libraries, government agencies, and other resources, you will research the architectural style, design, builder and former owners as you gather historical data.

## Criteria:

The scoring guidelines use three indices to assess an application. Each of these criteria has a point scale from 0 to 10. These cover the following considerations:

1. Architectural Considerations
2. Historical Considerations
3. Maintenance Considerations

**To receive a plaque, an applicant must score 6 or higher on each of three criteria. In addition, the building must have been constructed more than fifty years ago.**

The following examples are the minimum standard for scoring six points in each category.

## **Architectural Considerations**

The building is a good example of an established architectural style or vernacular design. Alterations may be present but do not substantially obscure or compromise the style or original design of the building. Examples of these undesirable alternations may include the following:

- additions or changes to the porches that are not consistent with the original design;
- Use of substitute siding in soffits and fascia;
- Exceptions may be made for the use of substitute siding if the appearance and exposure of the siding is consistent with the original look and other details, such as corner boards, window/door moldings, etc. are present and appropriate to the style of the building

## **Historical Considerations**

The building is typical of the era in which it was constructed or representative of larger developments (e.g., a home in specific subdivision or area which was developed more or less as a whole).

- The building was used over a number of years by small groups of citizens (e.g., small churches, private clubs, etc.).
- The building was associated with one family for a long period of time.
- The building has some association with the city's identity (e.g. in a prominent or landmark location).

## **Maintenance Considerations**

The building is adequately maintained. Although it may be in need of periodic maintenance such as minor painting, simple carpentry work, or repair/replacement of some secondary features such as gutters, screens, smaller size decorative elements which do not greatly detract from the overall appearance of the building. The surrounding landscape is adequately maintained.

## **Research Resources:**

Researching takes patience and organizational efforts but will be interesting and fun. The following information will provide you with a starting point. Please include copies of as much original documentation as possible with your application for review. (\* Denotes required documentation)

Primary sources are required to verify the historical information about your home. The following sources should be reviewed to find the information available on your property:

- \*Sanborn Maps (1887, 1891, 1897, 1903, 1913, 1950)
  - Shows footprints of houses – helps narrow date of construction and shows when additions were added.
- \*City Directories dating back to 1872
  - Shows who lived at what address. Includes spousal info and occupation of occupants.

- Newspaper Building Reports. Published in the Courier-News most years from 1886-1914.
- Early local publications and biographical publications
- Dateable Photographs
- Federal Census
- Elgin Probate Records
- Subdivision Plat maps
- Building Permits
  - Available from the 1920's onwards
- \* Original Property Deed
- Local surveys and building inventories
  - Available for select areas of the city
- A Field Guide to American Houses, Authored by Virginia and Lee McAlester
  - Provides a comprehensive review of American architectural styles
- Family letters. Diaries
- Genealogical records

These sources may be found at the following locations:

Elgin Area Historical Society  
 360 Park Street  
 Elgin IL 60120  
 (847) 742-4248  
[www.elginhistory.org](http://www.elginhistory.org)

Gail Borden Public Library  
 270 N Grove Avenue  
 Elgin IL 60120  
 (847) 742-2411  
[www.gailborden.info](http://www.gailborden.info)

City of Elgin  
 150 Dexter Ct  
 Elgin IL 60120  
 (847) 931-5910  
[www.cityofelgin.org](http://www.cityofelgin.org)

Recorder of Deeds/Kane County Government  
 Center  
 719 S Batavia Street  
 Geneva IL 60134  
 (630) 232-5935  
[www.kanecountyrecorder.net](http://www.kanecountyrecorder.net)

## Helpful Research Tips

### **Address changes:**

The City of Elgin changed the numbering system for the street addresses three times in 1871, 1884 and 1894. The property may be affected by these changes.

### **Occupants:**

Information about the occupants listed in the city directories can often be found in the obituaries of old newspapers on microfilm at the library. Death records for those buried in Elgin are available at the offices of Bluff City Cemetery, Lake Street Memorial Park and on microfilm at the Gail Borden Public Library.

In addition to newspaper obituaries, bound copies of the Elgin National Watch Company's "Watch Word" magazine contain accounts of some of the deceased. Thirty years of this publication are indexed and available at the Gail Borden Public Library.

**Houses Moved:**

Houses were moved more frequently in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries than today. If the architectural style is unusual for the indicated period of construction, or if the footprint, number of stories and lot location differ from that shown on the Sanborn maps, or if the address is not reflected in old city directories, the building may have been moved or the original demolished or destroyed by fire.

**Additional Assistance:**

Professional researchers are available.

**Street name changes:**

The last street name change occurred in 1894. The following street names changes occurred:

Hill St, Edward St and Ashton Ave to Hill Ave  
Arbor St to Preston Ave  
James St, William St, and Illinois St to Illinois Ave  
Cleveland Ave to Buckeye St  
Race St to Water St  
Willow to Summit St  
Pearl St to Division St  
Bridge St to W Chicago St  
Wilcox Ave to Western Ave  
W National St to Walnut Ave  
Alexander to River Bluff  
Broadway to N State  
Dexter St to National St  
Ettner Ave to N Porter St  
Galena Rd to W Highland Ave  
Grove to Lynch  
Lemonade to Wilcox  
Main St to State St  
Mill to Douglas Ave  
Milwaukee to E Highland Ave  
N Division to Jefferson  
Pinnacle to Franklin  
Railway Ave to Wellington Ave  
Summit St to State St

## “Mail Order” Houses

In 1996, the Elgin Heritage Commission created a special plaque to recognize the many mail order homes throughout the city.

From 1906 to 1982, nine major companies offered entire houses for sale through their mail order catalogues. Many were pre-cut “kit” homes, with framing lumber cut to size at the mill. The homes came with complete plans and cost approximately 30% less than standard construction. The primary savings were in labor and material costs; nor did the buyer have to pay for design services. Most houses were 1-1/2 or two story single family dwellings. Architectural Styles ranged from Craftsman, Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial, English Tudor Revival, Victorian, Mission, Spanish Revival, and Prairie.

Gordon-Van Tine, Aladdin, Harris Brothers, Lewis, Sterling, and Montgomery Ward homes have all been found in Elgin. To date, over 300 catalogue homes have been identified. This large number can be attributed to several factors. First, Elgin is located on major railroads, so the houses could be easily shipped to customers. Second, catalogue homes were marketed to families of modest means. Elgin’s large population of middle class working people was a logical market. And third, once one family in the neighborhood had a catalogue home, neighbors, friends, and family members could see well designed, sturdily built, and economically feasible this type of home was for them. Elgin’s close proximity to Chicago, the headquarters for Sears and Roebuck, Montgomery Ward and Harris Brothers, made these companies most attractive to mail order home buyers, since buyers paid shipping costs. By far however, the majority of Elgin’s mail order homes are from Sears and Roebuck.

The Depression led to the demise of catalogue homes as sales declined sharply and many owners defaulted on mortgage loans. After World War II, builders began marketing whole developments already built, which further cut into the mail order home market. By 1946, only Aladdin, Sterling and Lewis Companies offered pre-cut mail order homes. By 1982, all of these had ceased production.

**If you believe your home is a mail order home there are several additional sources you could research:**

Houses by Mail, Kathleen Cole Stevenson 1986.

Elgin Illinois, Sears House Research Project: Rebecca Hunter 2004.

Beyond Sears: Elgin Illinois Mail Order Homes: Rebecca Hunter, 2004

*Researching the history of your building can be a rewarding experience. If you have any questions after reading this material, please contact the Historic Preservation & Grants Planner in the Community Development Department at 847-931-6004.*

# Scoring Guidelines for Heritage Commission Plaque Applications

## Introduction

The Elgin Heritage Commission plaque program recognizes buildings with both historic and architectural merit. The program is intended to promote preservation and awareness of Elgin's past. The plaque is an acknowledgment of the owner's efforts to research and document the building's history and to maintain these structures as worthy examples of architectural style. The buildings and owners which receive plaques serve as role models for the larger community to emulate. The buildings become "reference books" for use in teaching others about our architectural and cultural heritage.

There are a large number of "kit" or "catalog" homes in Elgin. These buildings were originally constructed using pre-cut lumber and other materials largely supplied by a single source. The buildings were marketed through catalogs and sold by Sears, Roebuck and Company and other firms. The Heritage Commission plaque program recognizes these homes with a special plaque that documents the name of the original owner, the date of construction and the model name.

The following guidelines help to delineate the criteria used to evaluate a building and merit receiving the special status of being awarded a plaque.

## Scoring Guidelines

The scoring guidelines use three indices to assess an application. These cover the following considerations:

1. Architectural Considerations
2. Historical Considerations
3. Maintenance Considerations

Each of these indices has a point scale from 0 to 10.

**To receive a plaque, an applicant must score 6 or higher on each of three indices. In addition, the building must have been constructed more than fifty years ago.**

## Architectural Considerations

**10** - A superior example of an established architectural style. The key elements of the style are both present and well executed in the design. There is no, or very little, evidence of architectural details, or other features (such as antennas, mail boxes, storm doors/windows, gutters/down spouts, etc.) that are inconsistent with the style or original appearance of the building. This score maybe awarded to an exceptionally well executed building of vernacular design, if all the architectural details and other features are consistent with period in which it was built. From the exterior, the building appears to be in original, as built, condition.

**8** - A very good example of an established architectural style or vernacular design. The building may have alterations from its original appearance, such as additions, modified porches, changes to the windows, or missing architectural elements, etc., if these are changes are consistent with the overall style of the building, or, if not consistent, they have minimal impact on the building's appearance.

**6** - A good example of an established architectural style or vernacular design. Alterations maybe present but do not substantially obscure or compromise the style or original design of the building. Examples of these alternations may include additions or changes to the porches that are not consistent with the original design; Use of substitute siding in soffits and fascia; Use of substitute siding if the appearance and exposure of the siding is consistent with the original look and other details, such as corner boards, window/door moldings, etc. are present and appropriate to the style of the building.

**4** - A fair example of an established architectural style or vernacular design. Alterations are present and while not entirely compromising the original design they noticeably detract from the original appearance. Examples of these detracting features are: Key architectural elements of the style are missing or no longer visible; Additions and alterations are not in character with the original style or age of the building; The use of substitute siding has obscured corner boards, window/door moldings, etc. The design or application of substitute siding is not consistent with that used when the building was constructed, for example, excessively wide exposures, or ship-lap, or board and batten profiles. Or, the color scheme greatly varies from those typical of the era in which the building was constructed.

**2** - A poor example of an established architectural style or vernacular design. The building may have had very little architectural merit when constructed. Or, the building may have had subsequent additions and alterations which not consistent with the age of the building or have obscured many of the original architectural details. Or, the building has substitute siding made from asbestos, asphalt or a tar paper based products.

## **Historical Considerations**

**10** - A building associated with one or more individuals who played a leading role in Elgin's history (e.g., significant community leaders, business persons, artists, educators, builders/tradesmen, etc.) Or, a building that was the site of one or more significant historic events. Or, a building that by virtue of its use over time for either residential, commercial, institutional or industrial purposes, was associated with of a very large number of citizens. Or, a building that has a significant symbolic connection with city's identity (e.g., the Tower Building, Observatory, high schools, colleges, major institutions, prominent religious, commercial or public buildings.)

**8** - A building associated with one or more persons who were representative of Elgin's history but may not merit individual attention in an historical account, (e.g., watch workers, early settlers, small business operators, professionals, minor community leaders, etc.). Or, a building which was the site of one or more minor historic events. Or, a building that by virtue of its use



over time was associated with many citizens (e.g., large churches, smaller size schools, public or commercial buildings). Or, a building that has some notable connection with the city's identity (e.g., Teeple barn, Armory, Professional Building, etc.).

**6** - A building that is typical of the era in which it was constructed, or representative of larger developments (e.g., a home in specific subdivision or area which was developed more or less as a whole). Or, a building that was used over a number of years by small groups of citizens (e.g., small churches, private clubs, etc.). Or, a building that was associated with one family for a long period of time. Or, a building that has some association with the city's identity (e.g. in a prominent or landmark location).

**4** - A building which contributes only to a small degree to the larger historical context of the area in which it exists.

**2** - A building not associated with any of the historical or cultural conditions above. Or, while of an age eligible to receive a plaque, exists in isolation from a larger historical context (e.g., an in fill building from an era different than its surrounding structures).

### **Maintenance Considerations**

**10** - An exceptionally well maintained building showing virtually no signs of deterioration or in need of immediate maintenance or care. The surrounding landscape is also well maintained and complimentary to the building.

**8** - A very well maintained building that may show some minor indications of needing periodic maintenance, such as, touch up paint, small scale tuck pointing, very minor carpentry work, etc. The surrounding landscape is nicely maintained.

**6** - An adequately maintained building that may be in need of periodic maintenance such as minor painting, simple carpentry work, or repair/replacement of some secondary features such as gutters, screens, smaller size decorative elements which do not greatly detract from the overall appearance of the building. The surrounding landscape is adequately maintained.

**4** - A building noticeably in need of periodic maintenance which may include large areas of faded or peeling paint, worn out stairs, porches, siding or roofs, broken windows or doors, damaged or obviously missing architectural elements, etc. And/or, the surrounding landscape is poorly maintained and is such a condition that it noticeably detracts from the building's appearances.

**2** - A building in poor repair. One or more major areas needing immediate attention to prevent further rapid deterioration of the overall structure. And/or, the landscaping is in very poor condition, e.g. debris, overgrown vegetation, dead limbs or plants or large numbers of weeds.