

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FIRST 100 + YEARS (1854-1955)

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Since its original platting in 1854, Evanston (incorporated as a Town in 1863, a Village in 1872 and a City in 1882) has been linked to Chicago's Loop by the railroad, first the Chicago and North Western (now the Union Pacific) and subsequently the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. In addition, the North Shore Railroad linked Chicago with Milwaukee via Evanston from 1916 to 1963. All had stations at Davis Street. Transit service to Chicago was also provided in 1890 by the North Chicago Street Railway Company electric trolleys and subsequently CTA buses. In 1908 the CTA elevated railroad was opened to Central Street on the former Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul right-of-way.

Evanston's growth and prosperity was closely related to the founding of Northwestern University in 1851 and to the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, which caused many affluent Chicagoans to move north. The first store in the emerging settlement was built by Philo Purdy Judson in 1853 at the northeast corner of Orrington Avenue and Davis Street. When the Town

was incorporated in 1863, the first act of the new Town Council was to ban the sale of liquor consistent with the university's religious values. Subsequently, Evanston became the home of the Womens' Christian Temperance Union. Another long established community institution, the YMCA, was constructed on the periphery of downtown, on Grove Street at Maple Avenue, in 1898. By 1900 the population of Evanston reached 19,000 persons.

The dedication of downtown's focal point, Fountain Square, took place in 1876 just one block from the Davis Street railroad station (now Metra) station and the future CTA station. Still active today, these two stations form the hub of Evanston's modern rail, bus, and taxi (multi-modal) Transportation Center, completed in 1993. This is the only location in northeastern Illinois outside Chicago served today by all four modes of transit: Metra rail, CTA rail, CTA bus and Pace bus. Hardly a more transit-oriented suburb exists in all the U.S. In fact, Evanston's image is that of both "suburb" and "city".



*Fountain Square 1889*

*Source: Evanston Historical Society*

From the outset, much of the land in Downtown Evanston was owned by Northwestern University as income producing property. Developers entered into long-term leases for the construction of new buildings. In the early 1900s downtown focused on Fountain Square and a “central park” located on the south side of Church Street between Sherman and Orrington Avenues. In 1923 Clyde Dwight Foster entered into a 99-year lease on the park property and proceeded to construct the 708 Church Street Building, which occupies the site today. The cost of the lease was \$16,000/year for the first 50 years and \$32,000/year for the next 49 years. Since 1972 the property has been owned by a land trust including Frank Foster (Clyde’s son) and other beneficiaries.

Virtually all other Northwestern University properties have also been sold to private developers and placed on the property tax rolls – a goal long pursued by City government.

In 1916 the City of Evanston authorized the Evanston Small Parks and Playgrounds Association to appoint a committee and prepare a Plan of Evanston, published the following year. The City Plan Committee was composed of Daniel H. Burnham, Jr. (Chairman), Dwight H. Perkins, Thomas E. Tallmadge and Hubert Burnham. Hubert and Daniel were the sons of Daniel H. Burnham, world renowned architect and author of the 1909 Plan of Chicago.

A downtown plan contained therein embodied the following recommendations:

- Expand Commercial Park and place a fountain in its center;
- Build a landscaped public mall from Sherman Avenue to the Chicago and North Western;
- Open the C&NWRR embankment to Railroad Park and add another fountain;
- Move the Fountain Square fountain east;
- Add an auditorium and art gallery north of Church Street between Sherman and Orrington Avenue.

“The question of creating pleasing conditions in a suburb is not primarily a matter of money, but of thoughtful cooperation.... In every town a public-improvement commission should be formed to bring about the most orderly conditions within the town itself, and especially to act in cooperation with similar bodies in neighboring towns so as to secure harmonious, connected, and continuous improvement.”

*Daniel H. Burnham (resident of Evanston) and Edward H. Bennett, Plan of Chicago, 1909, p. 36.*



*Proposed City Center Looking West between Davis and Church Streets  
Source: 1917 Plan of Evanston; image courtesy of Evanston Historical Society*

City-wide Comprehensive Plans were also prepared in 1938 and in 1956. Each was based on a system of city-wide bus transit focusing on downtown, and a system of rail transit connecting Evanston to Chicago and other North Shore suburbs.

Hotels anchored the downtown early in its history: the North Shore Hotel in 1919 (designed by Robert S. DeGolyes); the Library Plaza Hotel in 1922 (built by Victor C. Carlson); the Orrington Hotel in 1923-24 (designed by Frank William Cauley); the Pick-Georgian Hotel in 1927 (designed by Albert S. Hecht); and the Homestead Hotel in 1928 (designed and built by Philip A. Danielson).

The Varsity Theater on Sherman Avenue and Lytton's apparel store at the northeast corner of Sherman Avenue and Church Street opened in 1926. The Carlson Building at 636 Church Street opened in 1928 and was occupied primarily by physicians and dentists. Marshall Field's (designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White) opened at the northwest corner in 1929. Other retailers followed nearby.

Downtown Evanston has always been considered "pedestrian friendly," even as automobiles became more prominent. Beauty was enhanced by tree-lined streets and street lights designed by Thomas E. Tallmadge in 1931. In the 1930s and 1940s Fountain Square remained the focal point, anchored on the northwest corner by the ornate City Hall (designed by Holabird and Roche and occupied in 1892), on the north by the Rood Building (designed by John T. Jennings), on the northeast by the State National Bank and Walgreens, on the southwest by the First National Bank, and on the southeast by the Chandler's building. In the very center of a vast paved area created by the intersection of Sherman Avenue, Orrington Avenue and Davis Street was the historic 1876 Centennial Fountain.

Prior to World War II and as late as 1945, all streets were two-way and diagonal parking at the curb prevailed. Vehicular congestion and vehicular-pedestrian conflicts increased due largely to downtown's success. The physical barriers created by CTA and North Western Railroad embankments divided the downtown in such a manner as to contain the most commercial development east of Benson Avenue.



*Fountain Square Looking East Along Davis Street, circa.1945  
Source: The Evanston Chamber of Commerce*

Once upon a time there was a Downtown Evanston that was a genteel place where people loved to come and shop. It was magical, filled with charming old architecture, castle-like, appropriate to the time and the scene. People came from miles and miles around to see and to buy fine clothing, furniture and a vast variety of other goods. Downtown Evanston was a queendom whose territory stretched as far as Elgin, and whose reputation went far beyond. There was something old world about the charming brick and stone buildings which edged its brick streets and the fountain which preserved a touch of grace at a busy intersection. All was well and prosperous. Clerks could even afford a certain haughtiness. After all, this was Evanston, a place of quality sought out by many. There was no worthy competition outside of the Loop itself. However, the seeds of decline were germinating and growing with the troublesome automobile. Where do you put those infernal things with more and more people coming to town?

*Source: 1989 Plan for Downtown Evanston, p. 5*

After the war, downtown construction picked up again. In 1946 the Rood Building burned down, to be replaced in 1948 by a new Rothschild's Building (designed by Alfred Samuel Alschuler, Jr. and Raphael Nathan Friedman). The City moved its City Hall in 1947 into the former Evanston Country Club building (designed by Holabird and Roche) at the corner of Grove Street and Oak Avenue. Its Fountain Square site was developed for a commercial office building (called the Three Sisters Building). By 1949 the Centennial Fountain had been replaced by a new War Memorial Fountain (designed by Hubert Burnham), and the Fountain Square intersection was reconfigured to include a landscaped median south of Davis Street and wider sidewalks with street trees. A modern Wiebolt's department store was built at the corner of Church Street and Oak Avenue in 1950. An enclosed pedestrian bridge connected the store to its parking garage on the west side of Oak Avenue.

Margery Blair Perkins, in her 1984 book *Evanstonia*, declared downtown Evanston to have had the "highest concentration of quality stores in the Chicago area outside the Loop." Customers came from as far away as Elgin and Racine to shop in Evanston, not only because of its selection of retail goods, but because of its ambiance.

Downtown's retail success created more demand for customer parking. In 1948 the city installed 1,200 parking meters to raise revenue for the acquisition of property and construction of public parking lots. By 1952 the city operated 14 parking lots containing approximately 1,000 spaces.

The relationship between downtown and Northwestern University became even more intimate as a result of private housing accommodations on the upper floors of commercial buildings, by apartment buildings occupied in large part by students and faculty, and ultimately by the construction of University Apartments on Orrington Avenue opposite the Orrington Hotel, in 1947.

In 1954, Rotary International moved its world service headquarters from Chicago to a new building (designed by Maher & McGrew) at the northwest corner of Davis Street and Ridge Avenue, giving global recognition to the name "Evanston". Since its founding in 1905 by attorney Paul Harris, Rotary has expanded to over 1.2 million professional men and women members in 31,600 clubs in 166 countries who live by the motto of "Service Above Self". Thousands of them visit Evanston annually. In 2005 Rotary International is anticipating over 50,000 Rotarians and family members will come to Chicago and Evanston for its annual world-wide conference, this being its centennial celebration.

In 1955, a new First National Bank building was constructed at the southwest corner of Fountain Square, establishing this intersection as the "financial center" of downtown with the State National Bank and Evanston Federal Savings and Loan as neighbors.

In the 1950s, however, the automobile replaced the pedestrian as king throughout America. This was evidenced dramatically by the construction of expressways, shopping centers and new bedroom suburbs. A new era had arrived.

## CHAPTER 2 LOCATION MAP

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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Northwestern University            | 11. Library Plaza Hotel | 21. Walgreen's                        |
| 2. Fountain Square                    | 12. Orrington Hotel     | 22. First National Bank               |
| 3. Chicago and North Western Station  | 13. Pick-Georgian Hotel | 23. Chandler's                        |
| 4. CTA Elevated System                | 14. Homestead Hotel     | 24. Rood Building/Rothchild's         |
| 5. Women's Christian Temperance Union | 15. Varsity Theater     | 25. Evanston Country Club             |
| 6. YMCA                               | 16. Lytton's            | 26. Wielbolt's                        |
| 7. Transportation Center              | 17. Carlson Building    | 27. University Apartments             |
| 8. Former "Central Park"              | 18. Marshall Field's    | 28. Rotary International              |
| 9. 1917 Public Mall Plan              | 19. City Hall           | 29. Evanston Federal Savings and Loan |
| 10. North Shore Hotel                 | 20. State National Bank | 30. Washington National Insurance     |

