

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

38.

Historic Designation Advisory Board

PROPOSED ATKINSON AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed Atkinson Avenue Historic District encompasses both sides of Atkinson Avenue between the John C. Lodge Expressway and Linwood Avenue. Atkinson Avenue is located approximately four miles from the center of downtown Detroit just south of the western portion of the nationally and locally designated Boston-Edison Historic District. The proposed district is comprised of six residential blocks; most of the houses on these blocks were built between 1915 and 1926 for the middle class and the majority are single family dwellings. There are approximately 225 structures in the proposed district.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed district are as shown on the attached map and are as follows:

- On the north, the alley between Atkinson and Edison;*
- On the east, the centerline of the John C. Lodge Service Drive;*
- On the south, the alley between Atkinson and Clairmount;*
- On the west, the centerline of Linwood.*

HISTORY: Atkinson Avenue was named in honor of William Francis Atkinson (1846-1907) in 1883 by John R. Williams, when that roadway was no more than a line on a map of Greenfield Township. The Williams Sub, including Atkinson from Woodward to Hamilton, was sold to Edward W. Voigt in 1884 and vacated in 1891. Atkinson was born in Ontario, Canada but settled in Port Huron, Michigan with his parents at the age of eight. He received recognition because of his superlative war record. He enlisted in the 22nd Michigan Infantry during the Civil war at the age of 16. Injured by bullet and captured at the Battle of Chickamauga, Atkinson became a prisoner of war at a Confederate prison at Danville, North Carolina. After a courageous mid-winter escape to West Virginia, he became first lieutenant and for the remainder of the war served on the signal corps of General Sherman's staff. He rose to the rank of captain before leaving the service in 1886. Atkinson studied law and was admitted to the Bar after the war, practicing law in Port Huron before moving to Detroit in 1882.

Atkinson Avenue from the Lodge Expressway to Linwood is comprised of parts of five subdivisions: the Joy Farm Sub, Lewis Park Sub, Jackson Park Sub, Boston Blvd. Sub, and Guerold's Sub. Because

the Boston-Edison Historic District west of the Lodge Expressway is composed of the same subdivisions, the history of the two contiguous areas is similar.

All of the land in these subdivisions was incorporated into the City of Detroit in 1915. Before that year, all but the south side and a few feet of the south part of the north side of Atkinson Avenue were part of Greenfield Township. The Boston Boulevard Sub was platted by Truman H. and John S. Newberry in 1913. That part of Atkinson Avenue in the Boston Boulevard Sub had the same building restrictions as Longfellow and Edison Streets. Homes were to be built 30' from the front lot line; building materials were to be solid brick, stone, cement, brick, stone veneer or stucco, except between Woodrow Wilson and 12th where frame dwellings were permitted. All homes were to have full basements of brick, stone or cement. Only ornamental fences of no more than 5' could be erected on the property, and homes had to be at least 4' from either side of the 40' wide lots and at least 5' from either side of 50' lots. Homes on corner lots were required to be at least 20' from the side streets. Even the cost of construction of the dwellings were specified; houses on Atkinson, like those on Edison, between Hamilton and Byron had to cost at least \$4,000; between Byron and Woodrow Wilson were to cost at least \$3,500; and between Woodrow Wilson and 12th at least \$3,000. All homes in Boston Boulevard Sub were to be single family dwellings of two full stories with at least 18' studdings or posts, with all ceilings full height.

Atkinson Avenue west of 12th Street is in the Joy Farm Subdivision. In 1894 the James F. Joy family obtained lot 34 and lot 47 of the Ten Thousand Acre Tract, originally deeded to Thomas Palmer. James F. Joy, an attorney and businessman, made his fortune from the railroads. In 1867 he became president of Michigan Central Railroad Company.

Restrictions were filed with the Joy Farm Sub and are similar to those of the Boston Boulevard Sub in required setback from street and side lot lines. Grade above sidewalk grade could only be 20" on Longfellow, Edison and Atkinson. The character of the houses to be built was restricted to single family private dwellings built on brick, stucco, stone or concrete basements; houses could not have flat roofs. The cost of buildings was required to be at least \$3,000, lower than the \$4,000 to \$5,000 required on Edison in the Joy Farm Sub.

Guerold's Sub, located in part of the block west of Byron, was platted in 1913 by Augustus Guerold. Restrictions were similar to those filed in other subs, with the exception being that houses had to cost at least \$3,500. The Lewis Park Subdivision,

in the block just east of 12th Street, was platted in 1914 by George Andrew Lewis, principal and founder of Lewis School for Stammerers. The Jackson Park Sub, just east of Lewis Park Sub, was platted in 1914. Two family dwellings were permitted on Atkinson in the latter two subdivisions. Atkinson Avenue generally followed closely the restrictions on Edison; as a result, the houses on both are similar in scale, detail, and massing.

Atkinson Avenue residents did not file deed restrictions in 1943 prohibiting non-Caucasians from purchasing houses, as was done by adjoining property owners on Edison and the whole Boston-Edison area to its north. Atkinson Avenue, although it is contained within the same subdivisions as neighboring Boston-Edison, is not included in the area represented by the Boston-Edison Association. The Atkinson Avenue Improvement Association, representing Atkinson residents from Rosa Parks Blvd. to Linwood, has been in existence since 1950.

Lots on Atkinson Avenue were generally equal to or less than the size of lots on Edison and houses were built to be equal to or less than the minimum required cost for houses on Edison. The average lot on Atkinson was 40' in width, on Edison it was 45', and on Longfellow, Boston and Chicago it was 50'.

The peak building period on Atkinson between 12th and John C. Lodge Service Drive was 1915-1919; between 12th and Linwood the peak building period was between 1919 and 1925. Buildings were built as early as 1914 near Hamilton and as late as 1936 near Linwood. Prior to 1914 there were houses on Atkinson from Woodward to Hamilton but none west of Hamilton.

Atkinson Avenue between Hamilton and Linwood was a place where an average middle-class person could build a very nice home. The erection of Henry Ford Hospital in 1915 may have influenced the development of Atkinson and Boston-Edison, since many doctors made their homes there. Ministers, real estate agents, architects, contractors, salesmen, a newspaper writer, insurance agents, and bankers were amongst the first residents on Atkinson.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: Most houses on Atkinson between the John C. Lodge Expressway and Linwood are two full stories tall with an attic. With a few exceptions mostly on corner lots, houses are of the "basic box" or "four-square" types; those terms referring to the cube-like massing of the main body of the house. Roof lines and porches offer diversity from house to house, and variety is achieved by clothing the houses in different traditional styles, such as Mediterranean, Colonial, or Tudor. All but the 1600-1700 block contains single-family dwellings; two-family dwellings were permitted to be built in the 1600-1700 block of Atkinson. There were no houses west of Hamilton prior to 1914, and no houses built west of 12th prior to 1917. The majority of the houses in the proposed district were built between 1915 and 1925.

1. 1163 Atkinson

This rustic looking pseudo-Tudor cottage was built for Samuel J. Webster, manager at Harry B. Parker Company, real estate and rentals, in 1917 by the architect J. Will Wilson at an approximate cost of \$4,000. By 1921, Ellis W. Ryan, president of Ryan Sales Engineering Company and Rex Sales Service, resided at 1163 Atkinson.

The house is a fine example of the English rustic cottage; the main body is brick but the corners, foundations and porch are random ashlar. The front porch is covered with a gabled roof decorated with half-timbering. On the second story level is a large half-timbered oriel window supported by heavy wooden brackets. This house has much of the charm of a small country Tudor dwelling.

2. 1188 Atkinson

This Colonial Revival style house was designed by the architect Richard H. Marr in 1914, making it one of the oldest houses in the proposed district. Construction was probably not completed until 1915. Richard Marr is well-known as an architect for the two impressive Tudor style mansions he designed for the Fisher brothers, Alfred and William, in Palmer Woods a decade after the construction of 1188 Atkinson.

Eleven eighty-eight Atkinson was designed in a simple Colonial Revival style; it has a hip roof with a central dormer, a modillion cornice, and shutters. The porch is off to one side of the front facade; brick piers support its simple classical entablature. A three-sided bay window occupies the remaining two bays of the first story.

Marr designed at least one other house in the proposed district; this is at 1154 Atkinson.

3. 1256 Atkinson

John T. Sillifant, a mason, built this Mediterranean style house at a cost of about \$7,000 for Jacob Mazer in 1916. Mazer was the successful president of the Peninsular Cigar Company and secretary/treasurer of the Mazer-Cressman Cigar Company. The latter was incorporated in 1906 and had 401 employees by 1920.

The hip roof of the Mazer house is covered in green Mediterranean tile in excellent condition. The facade of the house is asymmetrical; one enters through an arched opening on the east bay of the front facade. Round-headed arched French windows occupy the ground floor of the front facade. There is a rosette placed in a small square panel directly above the entrance. On the second story are balconets in front of the large rectangular sash windows.

1256 Atkinson contd.

Over the entrance on the second story are two smaller rectangular windows. A one-bay side wing set back from the front three-bay facade occupies the west side of the house. Attractive landscaping compliments the fine design of this substantial house sited on a corner lot.

4. 1451 Atkinson

Mandel E. Rosenberg purchased this lot in 1916 from the subdivider, Augustus Guerold, and resided in the house he had built until approximately 1940. Nathan Greenberg, a building contractor, erected this house and the house at 1443 for Mandel's brother, Julius E. Rosenberg, at a combined cost of \$7,000 (permit #1345). The Rosenberg brothers were manufacturers of fine furs. Atkinson Avenue was the address for many Detroiters of the Jewish faith from its inception.

The Mandel Rosenberg house is of orange brick; on the first story are long casement windows with fan transoms above. Stubby Doric columns support the porch roof. The hip roof of the house contains a central dormer with a recessed arch within.

5. 1500 Atkinson

Edgar Albert Guest, poet and journalist at the Detroit Free Press, lived at 1500 Atkinson in 1922 and 1923. Born in Birmingham, England in 1881, Guest came to Detroit with his family ten years later and lived here the rest of his life. In 1895 Guest started working at the Free Press as an office boy in the bookkeeping department; in 1897 he was promoted to office boy on the editorial floor. Guest's goal of becoming a reporter was realized when he was assigned to the exchange desk, where news of the world from reporting services flowed across his desk.

Best known for his poetry which spoke to everyday people, Guest's column of verse became a weekly feature in the Free Press. His first poem appeared in the Sunday edition on December 11, 1898. In 1909 he published his first book of verse entitled "A Heap O' Livin'".

If "it takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home,..." then Edgar Guest and his wife Nellie did not have time, by his own definition, to make 1500 Atkinson a home-- the Guests stayed there only two years.

The house itself was built for J. J. Cleary in 1916. The approximate cost of the house when built was \$3,000. It is a handsome brick-veneer basic box shaped house with a flat topped hip roof. The two dormers and first story porch also have similar mansard-type roofs. The most

1500 Atkinson contd.

distinctive feature of the house is the large stuccoed oriel window on the first story pierced with three large arched windows. The upper story is shingled.

6. 1556 Atkinson

William H. Kuni, an architect and builder, designed and erected this house at a cost of \$6,000 in 1917 for R. C. Gottlieb, a photographer and manager of San Remo Studios. Mr. Kuni's motto was "'Kuni-built' houses are different." His offices were nearby on Calvert near Linwood.

The Neo-Tudor style was commonplace in Detroit for houses built in that decade. A closer look at the Gottlieb house reveals that, in fact, Mr. Kuni may have been correct in stating that his houses were "different." This two-story house is brick with a stucco second story. Heavy vergeboards on gables of dormers, roof gables, half-timbering, and the large brackets supporting the transverse gable of the roof and battered porch piers are all characteristic of the Neo-Tudor style. However, Kuni added a cut-out cloverleaf motif to the ends of the vergeboards. He also added pegs at joints, mimicking Medieval construction techniques.

7. 1651 Atkinson

This house is fairly representative of the two-family dwellings on Atkinson between Woodrow Wilson and 12th. It is two stories tall with a high attic and a two-story bay of windows occupying the central and western bay. The roof dormers and porch have segmentally arched hoods with their flaired ends supported by brackets.

Harry B. Parker Company, real estate and rentals, had this building with two apartments constructed in 1916. It is of interest because Richard E. Raseman, architect of many Detroit buildings including Traugott Schmit Warehouse (Hess and Raseman, 1892) and Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church (1884), resided there in 1921-22. Clarence Day, another well-known architect later with the firm of Harley, Ellington and Day, lived directly across the street at 1652 Atkinson during those same years.

8. 2024 Atkinson

Herbert K. Barber was the builder and first owner of this house. Barber spent approximately \$8,000 to build it in 1921, that sum being at the middle range of estimated housing costs on Atkinson Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets in that year. Styled in the Cotswold cottage or old English country tradition, this house is composed of informally grouped masses and multiple overhanging sheltering roofs.

The first story of the house is, for the most part, brick; the second story facing the street is white stucco. A porte cochere, on the west side of the front facade facing the street, is actually an extension of the overhanging roof of the first story supported by thin timbers. The entrance to the house is set back on a faceted mass at the east side of the house; a carved ornamental frieze is set in a panel over the entrance. Also typical of the Cotswold cottage type are the wooden window shutters. This house is one of the most unusual in the proposed Atkinson Avenue district.

9. 2056 Atkinson

Donald N. Sweeney, a cashier at the Peoples State Bank, bought lot 663 of the Joy Farm in June, 1920 and in September Guy R. Shank took out a permit to build this house for an estimated cost of \$11,500. Sweeney resided in it until 1949.

This building at 2056 Atkinson has simple Colonial Revival detailing; its hip roof and modillion cornice rest upon a simple box-like mass. Windows contain eight-pane over eight-pane double-hung sashes. The classically detailed entrance portico is on the east wall of the house. It faces the entrance of a similar building across the driveways at 2050 Atkinson. Ivy growing on the front and side elevations of both houses unify them visually.

10. 2080 Atkinson

From the latter part of the building period of Atkinson Avenue is this house, constructed in 1924 for Clarence Warne Wilson. Wilson was an insurance agent for General Casualty and Surety Company. The estimated cost of construction for this house was \$18,000.

Built on a corner lot facing the north-south street, 14th Street, the house is larger than most on Atkinson. It is brick veneer with a multi-faceted roofline interrupted by projecting gables. The front facade is straightforward in composition; it is restrained Neo-Tudor in style.

2080 Atkinson contd.

Fenestration is almost symmetrical and the front roof gable is centered on the front facade. However, the sides and rear are less formal in appearance. The roof dormers and rear gable are clad in shingles. The detached garage on 14th Street has a jerkin head roof, or clipped gables, contributing to its rustic appearance.

11. 2326 Atkinson

Built in 1919 (permit #5832) for William J. Lambert, manager of Clayton and Lambert Manufacturing Company, manufacturers of gasoline and kerosine fire pots and torches and auto sheet metal products, this house is very similar in design to the house at 750 Virginia Park designed by George V. Pottle in 1910. John M. Meade took out the permit for the construction of the house on Atkinson; nothing is known about him.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Lambert formerly resided at 71 (old number) Virginia Park. He must have gazed across the street at 750 Virginia Park from his window and yearned for a house just like it, so he had one built almost ten years later at a cost of \$6,000, presumably by Mr. Pottle, on Atkinson Avenue.

2326 Atkinson is basically a four-square structure with diversity in roof shapes and interesting detail. The entrance is asymmetrically placed on the east end of the brown-brick front facade. A porch with brick piers supporting a shallow hip roof extends along the entire width of the first story.

Craftsman style elements dominate the attic story. The gable, beginning directly above the second story windows and culminating with the peak of the roof, is sheathed in wood horizontal siding. A frieze of vertical members interrupted by the lower extensions of brackets rests directly above the second story windows.

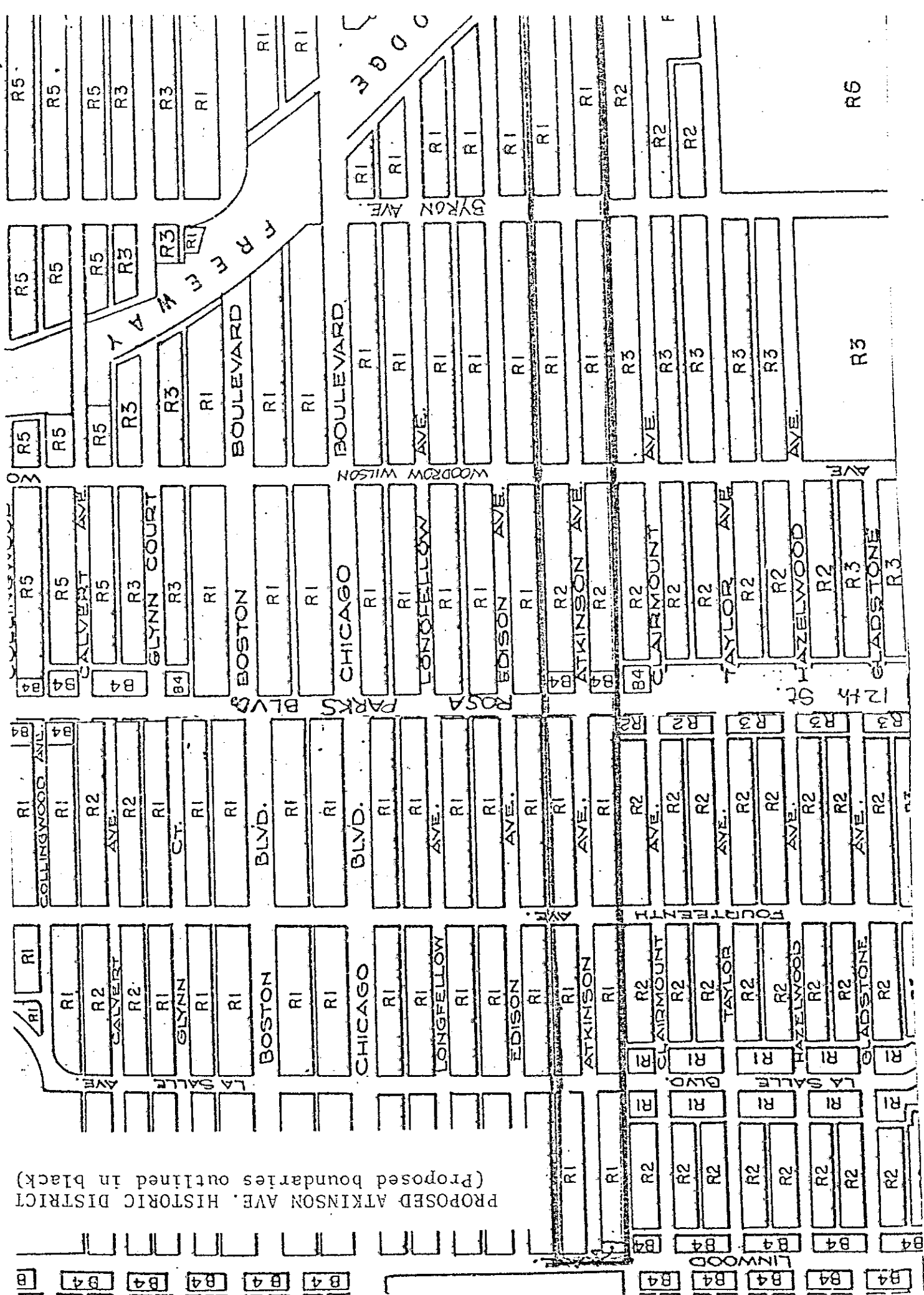
The overhanging eaves of the roof are supported by large wooden brackets with lower arms that extend the length of the attic. Attention to detail is reflected by the plainly visible wooden pegs on the cornice and simulated tool marks on the brackets.

12. 2503 and 2511 Atkinson

The houses at 2503 and 2511 Atkinson represent another unique planning idea. Both houses are L-shaped; the foot of the "L"s face each other. This allows for one driveway to be shared by both houses. This conception belonged to Herbert K. Barber, a builder, who owned both of these lots and built both houses in 1921-22. In 1923 he sold 2503 Atkinson to Winifield B. Phillips, president of W. B. Phillips Company, specializers in land contracts, and he sold 2511 Atkinson to Rupert W. Koch, an architect. A joint driveway agreement was made in 1923.

Architecturally, the two houses are very similar in design. Both plans are L-shaped; one-story ends of the the leg of the "L" form porches that face the street. The porch at 2503 Atkinson has a triumphal arch motive and the porch at 2511 Atkinson has a large arch and a steep gabled roof. Roofs over the two-story legs of the "L" of both houses are pitched and the roofs over the foot of the "L"s are hipped. 2503 Atkinson is all dark brown brick with wood trim, resulting in a Georgian appearance. 2511 Atkinson has a stucco second story and thus has an English Arts and Crafts feel. Together, the two houses form a distinctly handsome and innovative grouping.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the City Council establish the Atkinson Avenue Historic District with the design treatment level of conservation. A draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for the consideration of City Council.

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ATKINSON HISTORIC DISTRICT

