

The Dollar-Developers Take Aim At Beautiful Old Fox River Towns

Famous Illinois Architecture: XXV

By Paul E. Sprague

LOCATED ALONG the Fox River north of Elgin in Dundee Township are the three historic Kane County communities of West Dundee, East Dundee and old Carpentersville. Although the shadow of the insatiably expanding Chicago megapolis falls heavily on the surrounding countryside, it has not until recently threatened the historic fabric of these still largely untouched river towns.

The Goliaths, who appeared in the form of three large developers, are now

threatening these virtually helpless towns with a huge project contiguous to West Dundee consisting of an extensive shopping center married to low and high rise housing. In order to participate in this rape of the land, and "to progress" in our American fashion which ultimately will mean the destruction of the historic character of these towns, the local authorities are asked only to annex the proposed development, provide all municipal services, and—as a final insult—to widen

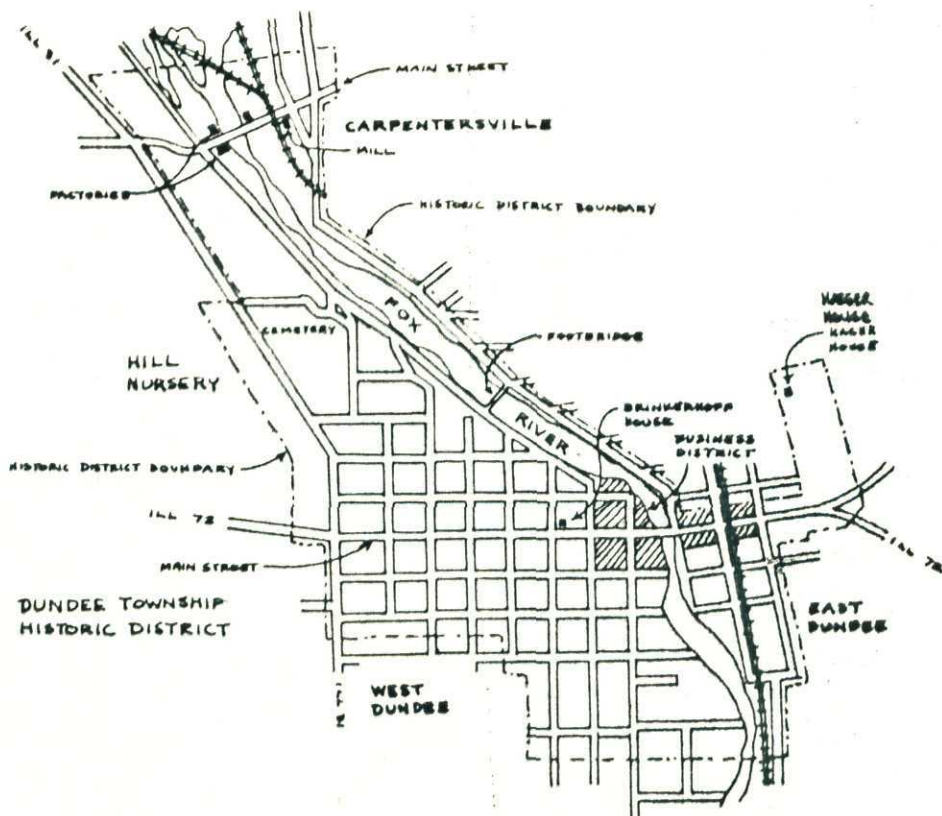
their main east-west streets for the expected avalanche of traffic.

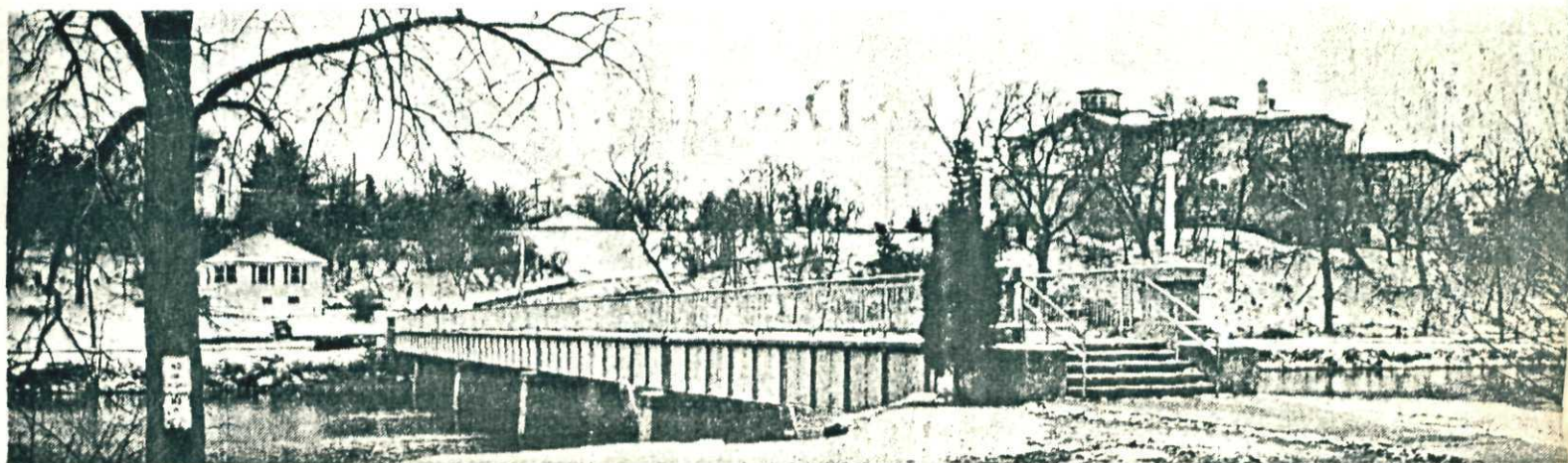
Given this lugubrious prospect, which will surely come to pass barring a full-blown depression, the author thought it worthwhile to record his impressions of these still attractive communities on a National Register nomination form before the Philistines have done their work. The historic district that resulted links the older parts of the three towns along a corridor centering on the Fox River which unites as well as separates the towns.

Between Carpentersville and the DundeEs the river runs for nearly a mile and a half in a southerly direction. It is bordered partly by lowlands, mostly dry but sometimes wet and swampy, and partly by low hills that rise gracefully out of the valley. Beyond these bluffs the land becomes a gently rolling prairie.

In West Dundee, much of which is included in the historic district, the small business center is concentrated in the lowland along the river. The residential part of the town climbs up the bluff to some forty feet above the river where it spreads out across the almost level prairie.

In order to include in the historic district the view east-along Main street which is visually so important to the West Dundee commercial area, the boundary of the district is carried to beyond the ridge line in East Dundee. Also included in the district in East Dundee is the old Hæger House, crowning the bluff north of Main Street, and the Hæger Potteries south





FOOTBRIDGE ACROSS Fox River (looking west) aids pedestrian traffic between East Dundee and West Dundee (across river). The old school in West Dundee is on hill at right.

of that street in the lowlands near the river.

Between the twin Dundees and Carpentersville there is a beautiful stretch of river valley enhanced, for the most part, by the hand of man. A road passing close to the river on either side runs along grassy and wooded banks. Except for a part of the western bank where bluffs lie close to the river, there are residences beyond these roads. About halfway to Carpentersville, there is a

pedestrian bridge over the river affording easy passage for East Dundee school children to the Union School on the bluff in West Dundee.

As you near Carpentersville the country becomes wooded, a railroad emerges on the east bank and a group of old factories comes gradually into view. At Carpentersville, where another road bridge crosses the river, there is a remarkably well-preserved group of nineteenth-century mill buildings. The oldest of these fine brick factories, all still in use, dates from 1871. North of the factories, the district ends at an old railroad bridge, now unused. Near it on

either side of the river the millraces that originally supplied the factories with water power can still be seen.

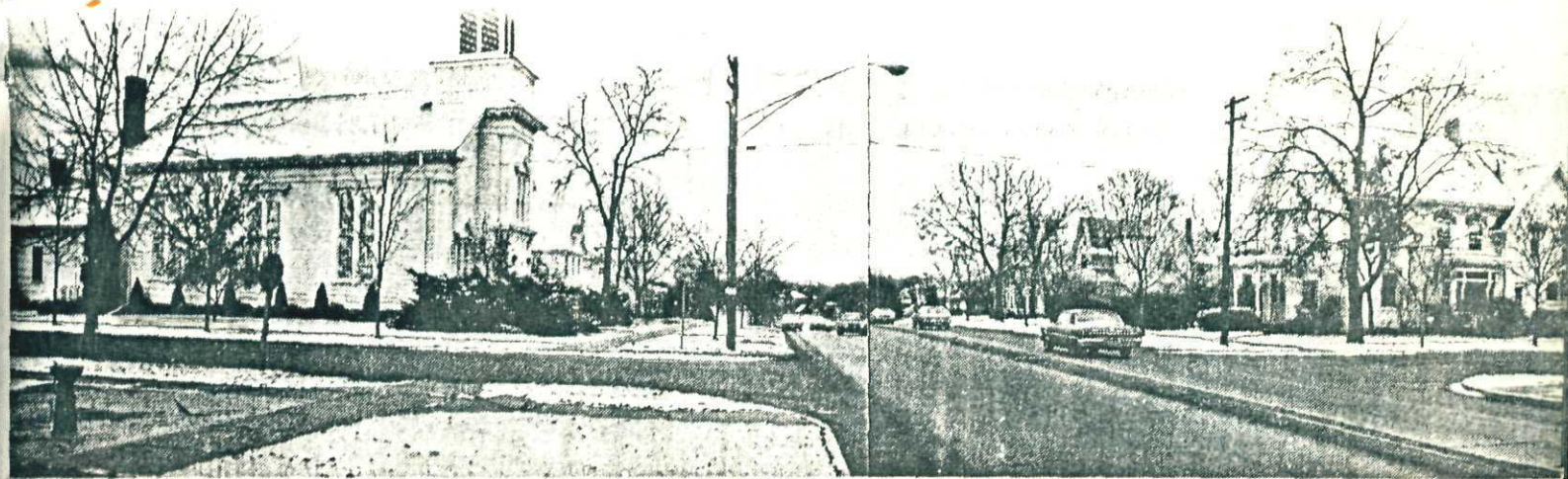
On the west side of the river between Carpentersville and West Dundee, where the bluffs come close to the river, the district line has been carried over the bluffs to State Highway 31. At one place the line crosses the highway to include 200 feet of the old Hill Nursery property and three fine nineteenth-century residences. East of the river, the land is quite flat, and there the district line runs along the far side of the river road.

A part of old Carpentersville, laid out like the Dundees on the grid system, is included in the district. Its triangular, open grassy center is faced by several nineteenth-century commercial buildings, one of them formerly a flour mill. North on Washington Street there is a fine former library building of 1895, an elegant Gothic Church of 1885, and several visually attractive older homes, all within the boundaries of the district.

Carpentersville was first settled by Daniel G. and Charles V. Carpenter in 1837. The village was not platted and settled, however, until 1851. That was the same year J. A. Carpenter built the first bridge over the river at Carpentersville. In 1869 the early bridge was replaced by a delicate iron structure of lattice construction which, in turn, gave



A PARADE of youngsters of German descent crosses the Main Street bridge at West Dundee. The storefronts of the first three buildings from the river have recently been restored.

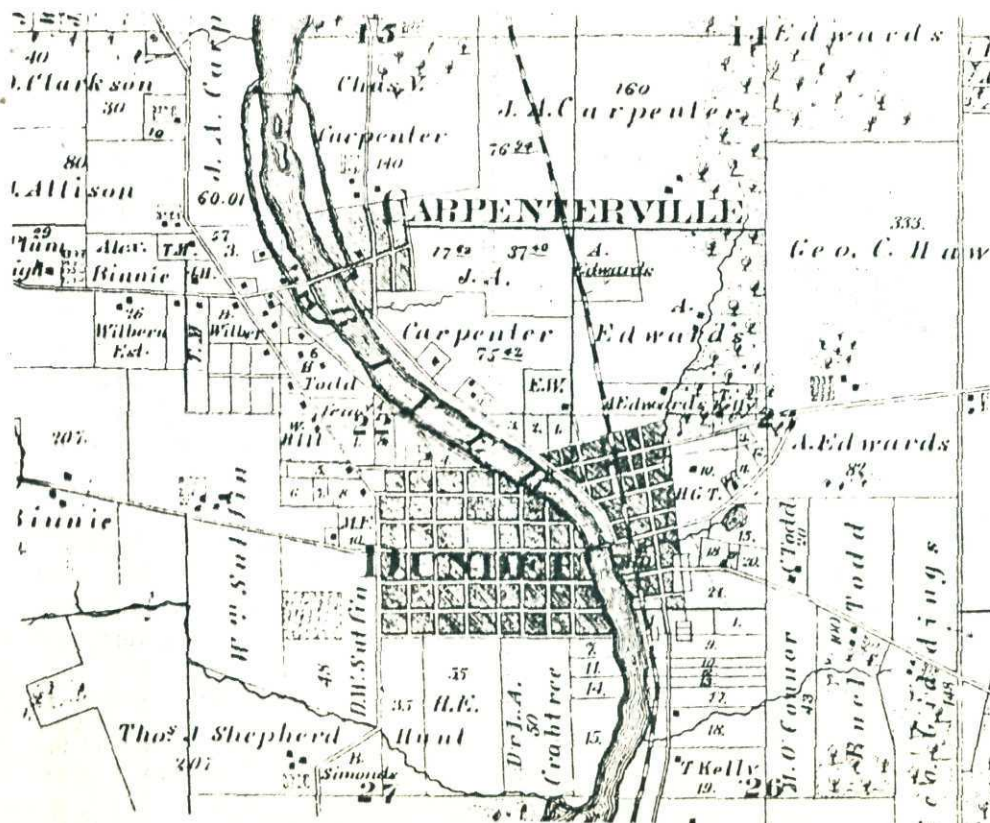
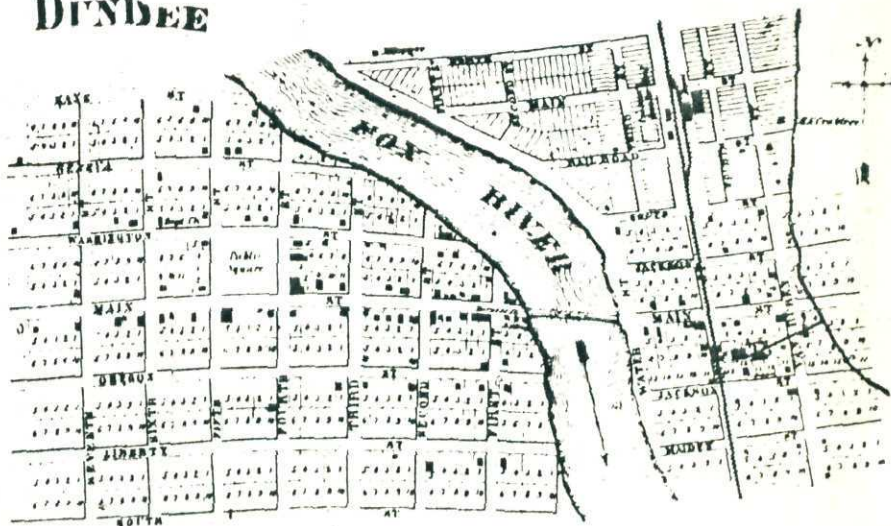


PANORAMA VIEW of West Dundee's Main Street, looking east toward business district.

way in the twenties or thirties to the present concrete span.

Carpentersville prospered because of the excellent water power available for manufacturing. The Fox river was dammed in the mid-1840s and millraces supplied power for the earliest industry, the Atlantic Flour Mill, which opened in 1846. All the industries were owned at one time by J. A. Carpenter, who before the Civil War built along the river a planing, shade, door and blind factory, and a machine shop. The Star Manufacturing Company, producing agricultural implements, opened in 1873. The largest Carpenter industry, and the largest employer in the town-

DUNDEE

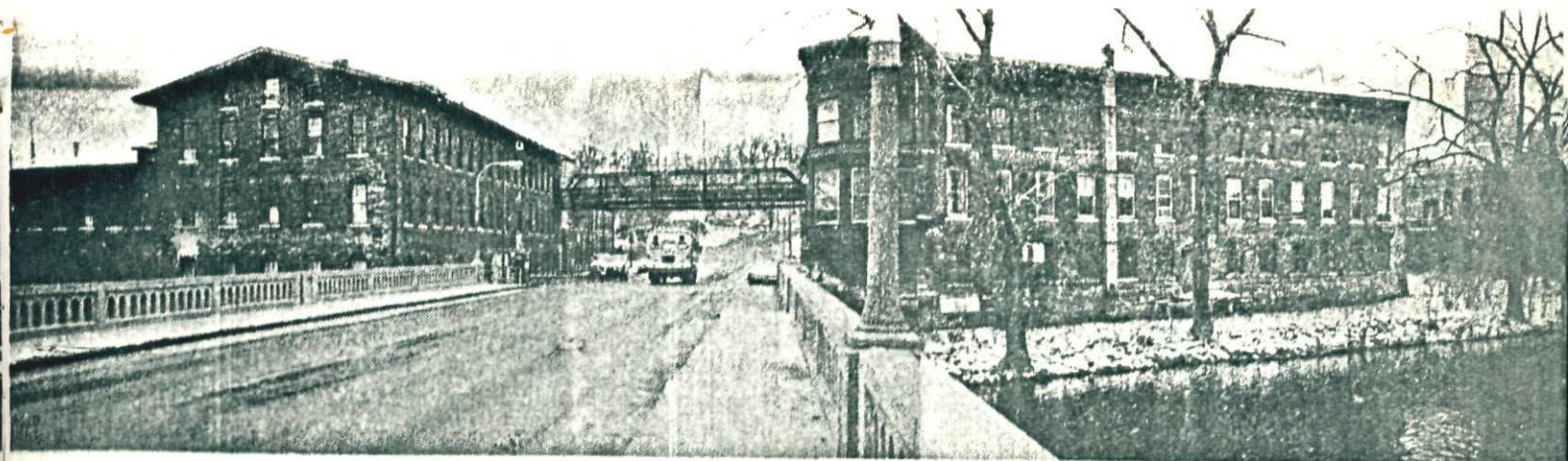


DUNDEE IN 1860, with some of prominent places marked, courtesy Aurora Historical Society.

ship, was the Illinois Iron and Bolt Company established in 1864 and relocated in 1871 in a three-story brick factory with cupola that is still in industrial use.

In 1878 the railroad, which originally passed east of Carpentersville, was relocated so as to pass through the factory district. It was this Fox Valley Railroad, built on the east bank of the river in 1854, that determined, probably more than anything else, the general character of the towns. Residences in Carpentersville and East Dundee, generally of modest size and cost, were built to house workers in the industries of the two towns. West Dundee, across the river and well away from the railroad and factories, evolved as the major commer-

MAP OF Dundee and Carpentersville circa 1875 at a time when Dundee Township had a population of 2079.



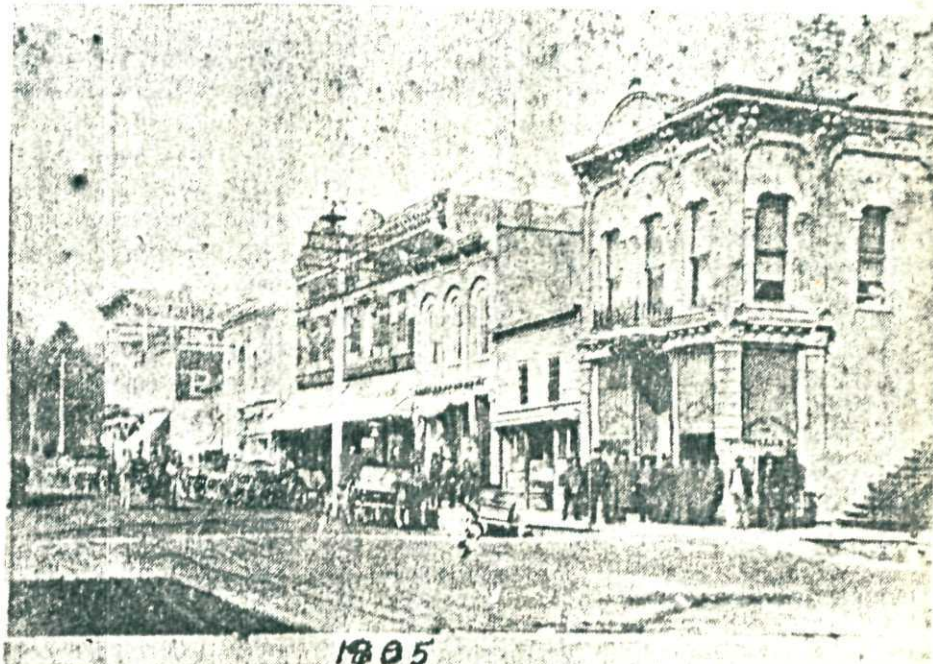
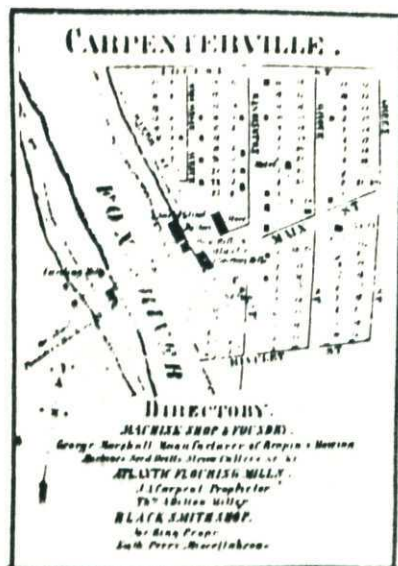
FACTORY BUILDINGS at Carpentersville, looking west from Fox River bridge.

cial center. On the bluffs beyond its main shopping street the more affluent citizens of the township built their homes.

Settlement in the Dundees dates from the late 1830s. West Dundee's first settler was Jessie H. Newman who, in 1834, erected a house on the west side of the river. Joseph Russell, traveling with Newman, built his house on the east side of the river thus becoming the first resident of East Dundee. In 1837 West Dundee was surveyed and platted; in 1842 East Dundee was laid out. The federal government began selling land in the township in September, 1840.

The first post office was established in West Dundee in 1836 and, in the same year, J. and H. Oatman opened a store in that town. By 1837 a dam had

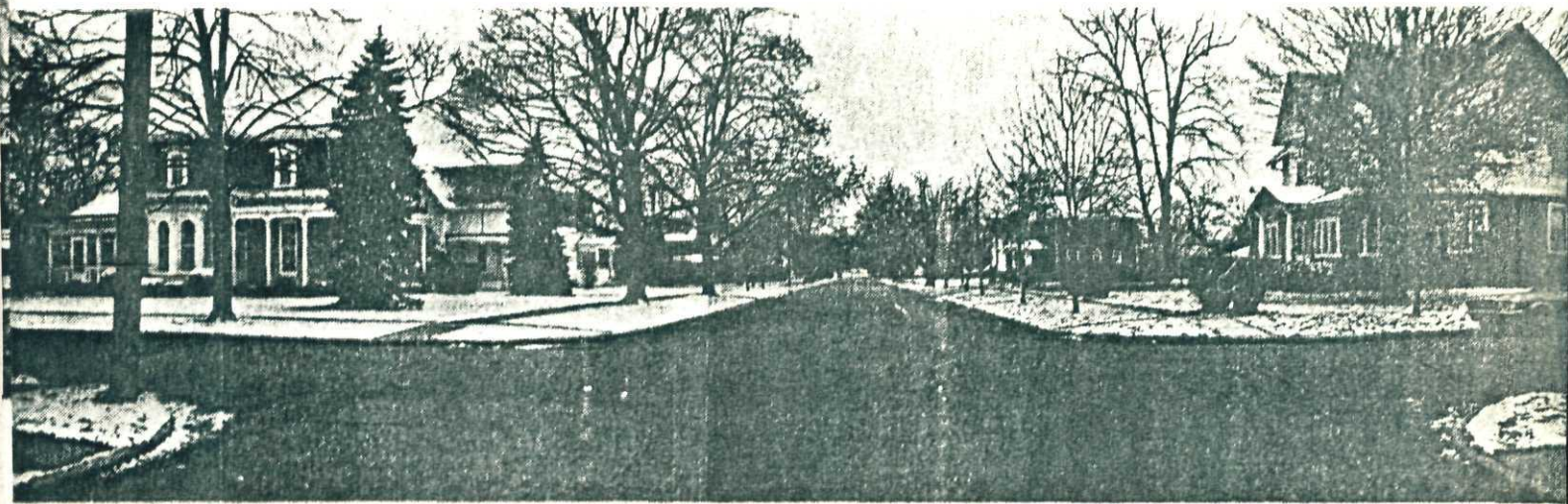
CARPENTERSVILLE in 1860, although the mapmaker insisted it was Carpenter-ville, without the "s."



WEST DUNDEE today, without the horses, buggies and wagons. Only superficial changes have been made on some buildings.

WEST DUNDEE ABOUT 1905, with Miller building on corner of Main and First streets. Note stairway far right.





been built and a saw mill was operating. In 1839 the first school opened.

The towns reached maturity in the early decades of this century for, by then, most of the residential, commercial and industrial properties on the original plat had been improved. Except for the inevitable rebuilding here and there along Main Street in East and West Dundee, the replacing of the river bridges, and the construction of new subdivisions at the periphery of each community, the three towns have remained very much as they were built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In general the density in the residential parts of the towns is low to medium with generous lots having deep setbacks while in the business sections the buildings have partywalls. The industrial areas contain large buildings with ample

open space around them. Most of the structures in the district are relatively old. About two-thirds were built before 1900. There are some new business buildings—a few the result of fires, others merely new as for example gas stations—and several metal buildings in the Hæger Pottery and Carpentersville areas. One group of apartments along the west side of the river above the foot bridge is new, out of place and out of character.

The architectural styles are those ordinarily encountered in Illinois towns of the period. Simple residences, probably but not strongly Greek Revival, remain from the earliest period. Many were elaborately remodeled in the 1880s and 1890s. The later houses are Italianate, and various shades of Classic Revival; one elegant little house has a mansard. There are also large numbers of Queen

RESIDENTIAL STREET IN West Dundee, at the corner of Oregon and Fourth Streets.

Anne residences, Gothic churches, and one large later Georgian Revival house tastefully adapted as a bank. The old factories run from Renaissance Revival through Queen Anne, a la factory styles of course. These and many of the business buildings, and some of the residences are built of a local Dundee brick, warm yellow in color, originally made by the Hæger works in East Dundee.

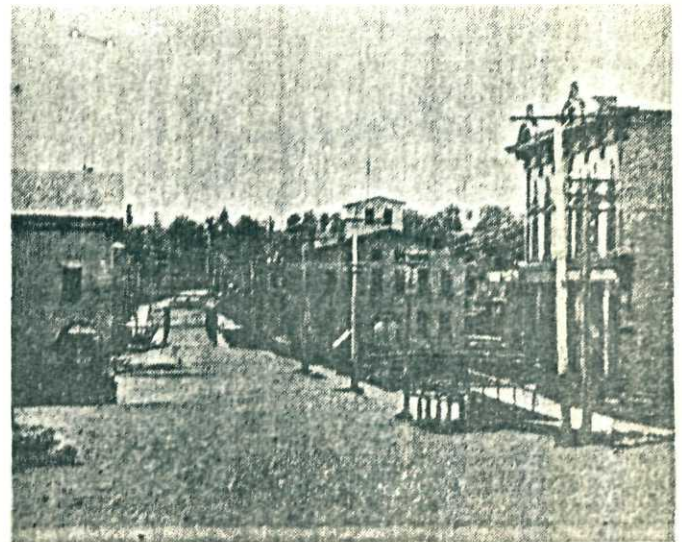
Although no detail or structure in the Dundees is itself of more than local interest, these towns with their hills, trees, lawns, river, gridiron streets, and older well-kept buildings possess a distinctive charm and character incredibly different from the modern develop-

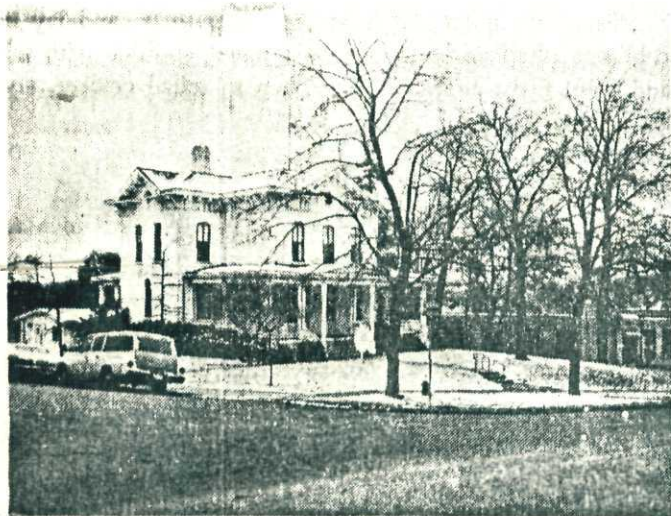
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OLD HOUSE on bluff overlooking river in West Dundee, of Queen Anne style, is representative of well kept homes in the area.

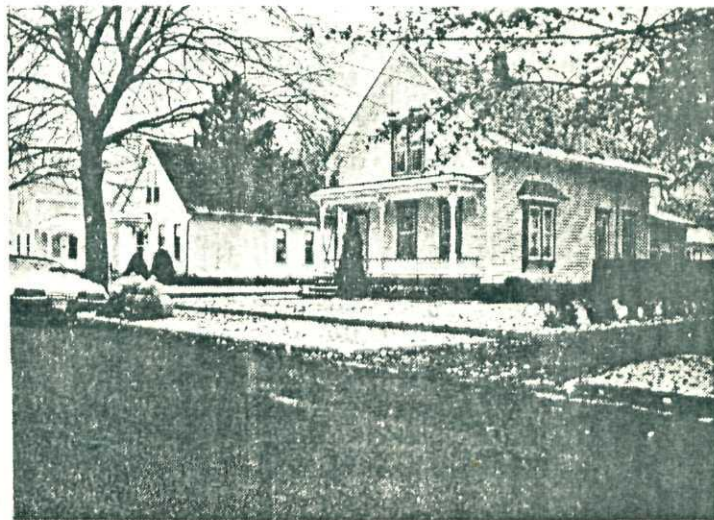


WISCONSIN STREET in Carpentersville, after 1873, looking west toward Fox River bridge.





BRINKERHOFF HOUSE at left, business district at right. House was in use as library in West Dundee when picture was taken.



NICELY DESIGNED and detailed workers' homes and cottages in West Dundee, built about 1890.

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ments, highway strips and suburban sprawl of Chicago rising on the prairies near them. The quiet pleasant environment of these towns and the delicate slothfulness of the river valley between them, provides a shuddering contrast to the hectic but transitory civilization being constructed around them.

Although there are as yet few intrusions in this sylvan setting, the pressures for change and growth are beginning to mount. A local bank is in the process of demolishing the Italianate Brinkerhoff House on Main Street in West Dundee to erect, in an unnecessarily spacious setting, a crudely modern place

of business designed without regard for its effect on the historic character of the town. This is the opening wedge that will split the town into two parts as the residential buildings along Main street are demolished or converted for business purposes. Couple this with the pressures for widening the street in anticipation of the hordes who will drive through to shop at the new commercial center west of these towns, and you have had one more example of the incredibly self-destructive nature of modern real estate practice.

Even now, before the damage is done and physical fabric of these historic towns replaced by the higher density town houses, condominiums, apartments,

and the commercial devastation that will surely come, local architects are erecting northern Disneyworlds in Dundee Township to satiate man's strong desire for roots and a visible connection with the past.

Is it really necessary for men to demolish the genuine historic fabric surrounding them only to replace it with such frail and transitory sham worlds? Wake up people of Dundee and America lest at the twelfth hour, having grown rich from despoiling the heritage entrusted to you by your fathers, you find you can no longer purchase a meaningful past for yourself and your children!



PRESENT WASTEFUL use of lovely riverfront, business parking instead of an amenity, looking southeast toward East Dundee and Main Street bridge.



BRIDGE OVER Fox River at Carpentersville, looking north beyond factories toward abandoned railroad bridge.

