



City of Geneva, Illinois

Local Historic District & Landmarks Property Inventory Survey

GENERAL PROPERTY INFORMATION:

HISTORIC NAME: Walter-Conant House

COMMON NAME: n/a

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: Circa 1868

SIGNIFICANT ALTERATION DATES: 1928, 1990, 2001, 2012

ARCHITECT: n/a

BUILDER: August Wilson & Son (1928)

WILSON BROTHERS: ☒ AUGUST ☐ OSCAR ☐ BOTH

ARCHITECTURAL DATA:

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Late Greek Revival / Early Italianate

OVERALL PLAN SHAPE: Cubic, Irregular

NUMBER OF STORIES: 2

FOUNDATION MATERIAL: Limestone, Concrete

PRIMARY WALL MATERIAL(S): Clapboard

FRONT PORCH: Yes

VISIBLE SIDE PORCH: No

ENTRY DOOR(S): Unknown

WINDOW MATERIAL: Wood (historic and 2012 replacements)

WINDOW STYLE: Double-hung (6/6)

PRIMARY ROOF FORM: Hipped

PRIMARY ROOF MATERIAL: Asphalt

VISIBLE CHIMNEY: Yes (non-original)

CHIMNEY MATERIAL: Brick (painted)

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES:

Form and mass of original section of house preserved; original exterior trim, frieze, and brackets retained; historic windows preserved at front facade.

PROPERTY ADDRESS:

311 South First Street

PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (PIN):

12-03-481-002



LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE RATING:

- ☐ Significant
- ☒ Contributing
- ☐ Non-Contributing – Built After 1987
- ☐ Non-Contributing – Reversible Alterations
- ☐ Non-Contributing – Irreversible Alterations

HISTORIC DISTRICT LOCATION:

- ☒ Central Geneva NRHD
- ☐ North Geneva NRHD
- ☒ Local Geneva HD
- ☐ Not in HD / Individual Historic Landmark

NR DISTRICT SIGNIFICANCE RATING:

- ☒ Contributing
- ☐ Non-Contributing
- ☐ Not Applicable / Not in NR District



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ADDITIONAL PROPERTY INFORMATION:

BRIEF HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION:

By 1857, John Francis Walter owned the land where the 311 S. First Street residence was built but was living in the limestone house at 301 S. First Street. The lots south of the limestone house and extending to Fulton Street were vacant.

The springhouse on the property was most likely built simultaneously with the limestone house at 301 S. First Street. Springhouses were common features on many properties in the vicinity of the Fox River. Built before the advent of modern refrigeration, springhouses utilized the underground springs and streams that fed the Fox River. The cool water, combined with the construction of these small shed structures, was used to preserve food, particularly dairy products.

The Walter property—consisting of Lots 8, 9, 10, and 11 in Block 72 and fronting First Street between Franklin and Fulton streets—was sold in 1858 to Eben Conant. Before 1869, a second house was built at the corner of First and Fulton streets.

Although Augustus Herrington owned the property after 1858, its evolution and history are unclear until the early 20th century. Eben Conant built the two houses that stood on the property by 1869. It is possible that the house at 311 S. First Street was built in the Cubic Greek Revival style but later remodeled in the Italianate style.

Between 1900 and 1910, Paul and Christine (Anderson) Esping acquired the property at 311 S. First Street, which included the house, stone springhouse, and the vacant land on Fulton Street.

Paul Esping (1837-1913) was born in Sweden and arrived in America in 1868; Christine (Anderson) Esping (1852-1922) was born in Sweden and arrived in 1869. Initially, Paul Esping may have come to Geneva because a relative—Julius Lambert Esping, a blacksmith—had settled in the area in 1855. (Julius L. Esping and his family moved to Mercer County, Illinois by 1870 and McPherson County, Kansas by 1880).

Paul and Christine Esping married in 1879 at the Geneva Lutheran Church. Paul Esping was a gardener/nurseryman, and, as late as 1904, raised nursery stock on land that is now occupied by the Sandholm subdivision, east of the Fox River and south of State Street. Before moving to the First Street property, the Esping family lived on Crissey Avenue (then known as East Batavia Street). The Esping children were: Selma (1881-1969); Ellen (1882-1978); Arvid (1886-1947); Harry (1887-1955); and Gertrude (1890-1932).

Between 1914 and 1919, the south portion of the property was sold to Harry Esping (327 S. First Street).

After their mother's death in 1922, Selma Esping (a long-time public school teacher at Geneva and Aurora) and Ellen Esping continued to live in the 311 S. First Street home until July 1928.

In July 1928, the property at 311 S. First Street (as well as the property at 301 S. First Street) was sold to contractor August Wilson and architect J. Howard Raftery. The houses were renovated and enlarged in conjunction with Kate Raftery's River Lane Beautification Project (1927-1941) which sought to improve the neighborhood bounded by James Street, Franklin Street, First Street, and the Fox River. Between 1928 and 1930, a one-story, detached garage was erected at the north side of the Esping house.

August Wilson, et. al. sold 311 S. First Street to Edward and Dorothy Ince in March 1938.



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ADDITIONAL PROPERTY INFORMATION:

In 1990, the house was remodeled and additions were constructed at the rear of the historic house. In 2001, the original garage was demolished and replaced with a two-story, "coach house-styled," three-bay garage. Also, at that time, the rear wing was enlarged at the second floor. During the summer of 2012, a fire broke out in the home and caused extensive damage to the interior and minor damage to the exterior of the house. Interior demolition was approved on August 10, 2012; window restoration was approved by the Historic Preservation Commission on September 25, 2012. Window restoration included the reconstruction of the First Street facade windows from window sash salvaged from the fire; all other windows were replaced with new, wood windows.

Geneva History Museum Plaque - 1986

The property is notable for its association with architecture—specifically the Cubic Greek Revival and Early Italianate styles—and for methods of construction (locally-quarried limestone construction and function) at the springhouse.

SOURCES:

GHPC Case Studies; GHM Archives; 2016 Central Geneva NRHP Update; 1869 Bird's Eye View of Geneva; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps; Kane County Recorder's Office Land Records; Geneva, Illinois: 150 Reminders of 150 Years



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CONTRIBUTING ACCESSORY STRUCTURES:

AS1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The limestone springhouse is one of the few remaining springhouses still standing in Geneva. The small limestone shed sits at the southeast corner of the property but is obscured from the public right-of-way by dense vegetation.

AS2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

n/a

CONTRIBUTING LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Spring-fed spillway that supplies water source to springhouse.



HPC ACTION:

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Demolition Approved: n/a

Other HPC Action:

4.17.01 Add'n Coach House;

9.24.12 Fire / Window Restoration



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1999





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