



City of Geneva, Illinois

Local Historic District & Landmarks
Property Inventory Survey

GENERAL PROPERTY INFORMATION:

HISTORIC NAME: Esping-Silvestri-Artman House

COMMON NAME: n/a

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1914

SIGNIFICANT ALTERATION DATES: Circa 1948-1956, 2004

ARCHITECT: n/a

BUILDER: n/a

WILSON BROTHERS: ☐ AUGUST ☐ OSCAR ☐ BOTH

ARCHITECTURAL DATA:

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: American Foursquare

OVERALL PLAN SHAPE: Rectangular

NUMBER OF STORIES: 2

FOUNDATION MATERIAL: Poured Concrete

PRIMARY WALL MATERIAL(S): Brick

FRONT PORCH: Yes

VISIBLE SIDE PORCH: No

ENTRY DOOR(S): Historic

WINDOW MATERIAL: Wood

WINDOW STYLE: Double-hung (1/1)

PRIMARY ROOF FORM: Hipped Pyramid

PRIMARY ROOF MATERIAL: Asphalt

VISIBLE CHIMNEY: No (removed 2004)

CHIMNEY MATERIAL: n/a

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES:

n/a

PROPERTY ADDRESS:

327 South First Street

PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (PIN):

12-03-481-003



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:

An account (believed to date to circa 1912) stated that bachelor Harry Esping discussed building “a new house on his lot in the west side addition during the spring months.” However, in 1914, Harry Esping purchased the southern portion of his widowed mother's property — 311 S. First Street. There, he began the construction of a modern brick residence, which some have speculated to be a Sears home (however no documentation supports this hypothesis). The house is also identified as having been constructed by the Wilson Brothers (however no documentation supports this conjecture).

Harry and Matilda “Tillie” (Kautz) Esping married in October 1914 in Geneva (31 October 1914 Geneva Republican) and moved into the First Street home upon their return from their honeymoon.

In 1921, the house was transferred to local banker Oscar Nelson, who sold the property to Silvio Silvestri (1877-1939), an Italian-born sculptor who worked for Colonel and Nellie Fabyan. Silvio Silvestri lived in this house with his wife, Rosa (1887- 1969), and children, Vera (1911-1977), Mario (1912-1996), and Henry (1919-2005).

Silvestri arrived, permanently, in the United States in 1908 and, within a few years, settled in Chicago, where his first two children were born. By 1916, the family lived in Geneva, Illinois, where Silvestri was hired as the resident sculptor for the Fabyan Estate. There, Silvestri produced several sand-cast, cement lanterns for the Japanese Tea Garden as well as cement benches, tables, and sculptures around the Fabyan Estate grounds. Some of Silvestri's work remains on the Fabyan property.

In addition to his work for Colonel and Nellie Fabyan, Silvio Silvestri completed other commissions and is credited as the sculptor of the fox sculptures on the Main Street bridge in St. Charles, Illinois. Cast in France (sculpted between 1922 and 1924 and cast between 1924 and 1926), the foxes were donated to the City of St. Charles by Herbert Crane, and, in 1927, were placed on marble balustrades designed by Lester J. Norris. The St. Charles sculptures may have been some of the last commissions completed in Illinois before the Silvestri family sold the First Street property in 1925 and relocated to Los Angeles, California. The Silvestri family only lived at this site from August 1921-June 1925.

During his brief tenure, Silvestri constructed a garage and sun porch as well as installed a sand-cast concrete fence and benches in the landscape at 327 S. First Street. Based on a review of fire insurance maps, the additions were likely made to the east (rear) side of the original house, with the original garage carved out of a portion of the original basement.

During the Great Depression, the next owners defaulted, and the property was transferred to Ned Silvestri (1929), who sold it to William Rosenfelder (1942), who then, in 1948, sold the property to Noel Artman, an attorney. Apparently, the original house was enlarged between 1949 and 1956 by Mr. Artman. At that time, the existing, three-story, east (rear) addition with a basement level, twin bay garage was constructed.



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ADDITIONAL PROPERTY INFORMATION:

Mr. Artman sold the property to C. Kenneth and Ruth Ekiss in 1957. In a letter on file at the Geneva History Museum, the Ekiss' daughter, Joan Caruthers, recounted that the family unearthed several fox castings that were apparently discarded by Silvio Silvestri when sculpting the foxes that eventually graced the St. Charles bridge.

The property is notable for its association with one or more significant persons—specifically sculptor Silvio Silvestri, who completed several significant commissions while living at this property.

SOURCES:

GHPC Case Studies; GHM Archives; 2016 Central Geneva NRHP Update; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps; Kane County Recorder's Office Land Records



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CONTRIBUTING ACCESSORY STRUCTURES:

AS1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

n/a

AS2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

n/a

CONTRIBUTING LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

In 2005, a permit application was submitted for a new, masonry fence at the First Street frontage. The request was rejected. No further documentation exists regarding the fence, so it is presumable that the historic fence was only rehabilitated with the application of a painted coating. The fence posts are identical to historic concrete fence posts at 111 Franklin Street, which also may be original sand-cast fence posts by Silvestri.

HPC ACTION:

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Demolition Approved: n/a

Other HPC Action:

8.19.03 Demo Garage, Add'n





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1999