

Chicago Tribune

Fore! Historic house near golf course may be coming down

Fairbanks house near golf course in Wheaton in jeopardy

By Bob Goldsborough, Special to the Tribune
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Local preservationists are rallying around a historic eight-bedroom mansion in a wooded, secluded area near the Chicago Golf Club in unincorporated Wheaton that they say is in serious jeopardy of falling to the wrecking ball.

In early April, the owners of the three-story Fairbanks house, on Hawthorne Lane between the Hunters Glen subdivision and the golf course, officially placed the home for sale for \$1.095 million and are marketing it solely as a teardown, with all the value in the property's 1.72-acre lot facing the links. Its broker also suggests dividing the property into two lots by annexing it to Wheaton and connecting it to the city's water and sewer system.

The prospect of losing the Fairbanks house alarms local preservationists, who point to its historical and architectural significance. Records show that the house was designed by noted architect Jarvis Hunt and built in 1903 for one-time Chicago Golf Club Vice President Alan Reid, a real estate executive who was a close associate of golf pioneer and club founder Charles Blair Macdonald. Reid also held various leadership positions in the United States Golf Association, the Western Golf Association and the Chicago Club, and was recognized for being instrumental in the development of golf in the Chicago area. After Reid's death in 1911, Hunt took over the mansion and rented it to golf club members over the next decade-plus, including to Mason Phelps, who led the U.S. team to a gold medal in golf in the 1904 Olympics. Hunt sold the house in the 1920s to Wheaton physician George Dyche. Current owners William and Elaine Fairbanks bought it in 1969.

"The old Alan Reid house is yet another example of an historic home that represents a significant portion of Wheaton and Chicago history that has been forgotten," said local historian Chip Krueger. "Perhaps if the community realized the significance of this lost history, there would be a push to preserve homes like this."

William Fairbanks said that he and his family enjoyed raising their children in the house, which overlooks the scenic first hole of Chicago Golf. He acknowledged that like any older house, it could use some work, but that it can be restored.

"It's a beautiful house, and we've enjoyed living here," Fairbanks said.

Fairbanks added a large, in-ground swimming pool on the property after he bought it. The house is part of a historic district that last fall made the nonprofit group Landmarks Illinois' annual list of most endangered places in the Chicago area. Two other Wheaton-area houses designed by Hunt (1863-1941) have been razed since 2007: Chicago Edison

founder Frank Gorton's Winfield Road mansion, which the DuPage County Forest Preserve District leveled in 2007 after buying the St. James Farm property from the estate of a later owner, industrialist Brooks McCormick; and the former residence of noted industrialist and President Woodrow Wilson confidant Edward Hurley, on the Wheaton Franciscans' Roosevelt Road campus in Wheaton.

School of the Art Institute of Chicago art history and historic preservation professor Rolf Achilles, a Landmarks Illinois board member, called the Fairbanks mansion "one of the few remaining examples of domestic architecture by Jarvis Hunt," and pointed to its original details.

"The house is in mostly original condition, which alone gives it credibility," Achilles said. "In 1903, this house was an important contribution to its neighborhood. It remains so today. Houses of this quality and historical importance are not being built today, no matter what their cost."

Wheaton Center for History Chief Executive Officer Alberta Adamson called the prospect of the house's demolition "horrible" and noted its relationship to the history of the Chicago Golf Club.

"Why do people feel it's OK to tear down these homes?" Adamson asked. "I don't know what the inside of this house looks like, but from the outside, it looks pretty much intact to me."

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