

2022 MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES IN ILLINOIS



Eugene S. Pike House

Chicago

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- GRACE KUIKMAN

Assistant Director, Beverly Area Planning Association



QUICK STATS

LOCATION

1826 W. 91st St.
Chicago, Cook County

YEAR BUILT

1894

ARCHITECT

Harry Hale Waterman

CURRENT OWNER

Forest Preserve District of
Cook County



HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Eugene S. Pike House, also known informally as the “Watchman’s Residence,” is a picturesque, late-19th century home nestled at the southern edge of the Dan Ryan Woods and is included in the National Register of Historic Places Ridge Historic District.

WHY IT IS ENDANGERED

Vacant and deteriorating, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County needs an outside user who can occupy and invest in the property.

TAKE ACTION

Reach out to the Beverly Area Planning Association if interested in participating in the community effort to reuse the Pike House.



BACKGROUND

The Eugene S. Pike House, commonly known as the “Watchman’s House,” was built in 1894 as part of a private estate in Chicago’s Washington Heights community (now the neighborhood of North Beverly), four years after Washington Heights’ annexation into the City of Chicago. Eugene S. Pike was a prominent real estate developer and financier who lived alongside many of Chicago’s wealthiest businessmen on Prairie Avenue in Chicago.

He built this weekend estate in today’s North Beverly neighborhood as part of his interest in residential development on the city’s expanding Far South Side. In addition to helping develop Beverly into the residential community it is today, Pike built the Mentor Building at the corner of State and Monroe Streets in Chicago and served on the Board of Directors of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. A lover of landscaping and gardens, he built for himself a “gardener’s cottage” and selected Harry Hale Waterman as his architect. Waterman designed many homes and buildings in Chicago’s Beverly, Morgan Park and Hyde Park neighborhoods. As a young man, Waterman worked with Frank Lloyd Wright in the office of architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee.





BACKGROUND cont.

For the Pike House, Waterman chose a Tudor Revival style with picturesque features that include a round tower, a steeply pitched roof with small dormers and carved wood ornamentation. The house fits within the natural environment of today's Dan Ryan Woods behind it. The American Institute of Architects Guide to Chicago noted about the location, "Expect Hansel and Gretel to come tripping past this house set on the edge of the woods."



*Historic photo of the Pike House.
Courtesy Ridge Historical Society*

In 1921, the [Forest Preserve District of Cook County](#) (FPDCC) purchased 32 acres of the Pike estate, including the house. According to newspaper accounts, FPDCC intended to use the house as a superintendent's headquarters and residence. The house eventually became known informally as the "Watchman's Residence" when it was adapted for that use in the 1960s. In 1921, the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners was Dan Ryan. The preserve was initially known as the "Beverly Hills Woods." Ryan died in office in 1923, and the following year the preserve was renamed [Dan Ryan Woods](#) in his honor.

The house sits on the southern tip of the Dan Ryan Woods with its front façade facing a residential section of 91st Street. The east side faces a driveway and parking area used by FPDCC personnel. The back faces open green space, and the west side faces the woods. The house is included in the [Historic Architectural Resources Geographic Information System](#) compiled by the former Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in the 1970s and is a contributing building in the [Ridge Historic District](#) listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Pike House is also rated "orange" in the [City of Chicago's Historic Resources Survey](#), which means it possesses some architectural feature or historical association that makes it potentially significant in the context of the surrounding community. In 1962, the interior of the Pike House was largely gutted to update it for a "watchman's residence." None of the original historic features inside the house remain, except for a sunporch, making the space flexible for other uses.



BACKGROUND cont.

In 2017, the FPDCC commissioned a [Conversion Feasibility study](#) prepared by the firm of Kuklinski and Rappe Architects that included information on the home's condition and needed upgrades for public use. The feasibility study noted the house was, "in poor condition with masonry issues and a damaged roof." It further stated, "Before the building could be repurposed there are substantial renovations needed. Building systems (heating, electrical, plumbing) require replacement. Interior finishes are in marginal to poor condition. The scope of work includes extensive repairs and replacement of building components and systems to meet code requirements, given the building's existing condition." At that time, FPDCC officials estimated \$300,000 in repair costs were needed for the roof and exterior alone.

The building is considered a community landmark due to its location on the edge of the forest preserve, facing a residential street. The 257-acre Dan Ryan Woods is the only piece of FPDCC land entirely enclosed in the city. The forest preserve includes the tip of the Blue Island Ridge, an important geological feature that is the highest elevation in Chicago, about 60 feet higher than downtown. For over a century, the Pike House has been a familiar feature of Dan Ryan Woods and the Beverly neighborhood.





CURRENT THREAT

The Pike House has been vacant for approximately six years after its use as a watchman's residence was discontinued. It has since suffered deterioration due to a lack of funds for its maintenance.



The FPDCC issued a [Request for Information](#) to the public in 2018 for potential interest in the use and rehab of the house, but no serious offers were received. The structure has also been on the FPDCC's long-term demolition list. The FPCC plans to issue a new Request for Expression of Interest this spring seeking serious options for funding and rehabilitating the house for long-term reuse, which could include private residential, business and/or nonprofit use.

Recognizing that forest preserve districts have a mandate to conserve open space and prioritize funding toward that mission, Landmarks Illinois has urged FPDCC and all forest preserve boards to establish a more robust process for seeking community input and soliciting potential users to rehabilitate and occupy their older and historic buildings under long-term license and lease agreements.

The FPDCC [continues to work with its Conservation and Policy Council](#) on land use policy, including acquisition and disposition practices. Landmarks Illinois is also working with the FPDCC to study additional policy and reuse opportunities for its surplus historic and cultural properties. The use of license agreements is the norm and could be amended to allow for more outside user flexibility. However, other government entities increasingly are seeking long-term lease/rehabilitation agreements with private users, including the successful Old Cook County Hospital rehabilitation and reuse made possible by Cook County's long-term lease agreement with a developer. Forest preserves may be able to also benefit from this model.



CURRENT THREAT cont.

The greater Beverly community, led by the [Beverly Area Planning Association](#) (BAPA) and the [Ridge Historical Society](#) (RHS), is also eager to work with the FPDCC and the public to develop a viable reuse solution and rehabilitation plan for the historic home.



With its location close to the 91st St. Metra station and at the south entry to Dan Ryan Woods, where an extension of the [Major Taylor Bike Trail](#) is planned, a rehabilitated Pike House could provide leasable space for a refreshments-to-go window, bike rental or neighborhood meeting and co-working space. However, any proposed reuse will need some initial investment by the FPDCC to stabilize the house before a nonprofit steps in.

“The Beverly Area Planning Association and Ridge Historical Society share a mission to protect the history and architecture of the Beverly/Morgan Park community,” said Grace Kuikman, Assistant Director of BAPA. “We have partnered in the effort to save the Eugene S. Pike House because of its significance to the history of both our community and our city, its importance as a design by noted architect Harry Hale Waterman and its stature as a contributing structure in the national Ridge Historic District. The confluence of these factors is that this is a community that treasures history and architecture, and is served by civic and government officials who support our endeavors to protect them for future generations and community organizations dedicated to preservation.”

It is important for forest preserve districts to engage in long-term planning processes that include cultural resources. They should also seek community input and reevaluate license and lease agreement policies to find viable solutions for their surplus historic and older properties. Otherwise, finding alternatives to demolition will continue to be a challenge.

Sustainable practices are a priority for all forest preserve districts, and rehabilitation and reuse of older buildings should be part of the sustainability mission. Demolition of these structures disposes of buildings with embodied energy and durable materials, such as old-growth wood, that can never be replaced.



CURRENT THREAT cont.

Historic properties in other regional forest preserves are also threatened with demolition due to discontinued use, vacancy and deterioration.

GENEVA, ILLINOIS:

An early 1900s former servants' home built as part of the Fabyan Villa estate, now in Geneva's Fabyan Forest Preserve, has been vacant for over a decade and needs of an estimated \$320,000 of repairs that the Forest Preserve District of Kane County (FPDKC) is unable to budget for. The forest preserve district is still interested in maintaining and preserving the servants' home if it can find a viable use for it.



With local organizations such as Preservation Partners of Fox Valley, which provides tours and heritage interpretation at nearby historic properties, local preservation commissions, planning officials and community members, there should be strategizing about the next steps to stabilize the property and how to market it to potential users appropriate for its location within a forest preserve.

RIVERWOODS & METTAWA, ILLINOIS:

The Lake County Forest Preserves (LCFPD), which demolished historic buildings at the Landmarks Illinois 2016 Most Endangered site, Lakewood Farms, has had a successful long-term lease agreement with the Brushwood Center for the Nora and Edward Ryerson House at the Ryerson Conservation Area in Riverwoods. However, the forest preserve continues to plan to demolish many historic structures, most recently a grouping of historic cabins at the Ryerson Conservation Area. The LCFPD advertised to the public in March the opportunity to move the cabins, yet with a very tight deadline of May 20, 2022.

In the meantime, the LCFPD continues to weigh demolition as an option for the Adlai Stevenson House, which was given National Historic Landmark status in 2013 and is an important heritage tourism site in Lake County and Illinois. On April 6, 2022, Crain's Chicago Business reported, "Lake County Forest Preserve officials are looking at 'all options, including demolition' of the former home to the man who was governor of Illinois, U.N. ambassador and presidential candidate." Demolition of this extremely important historic site should not be considered an option.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

If interested in engaging in the effort to save the Pike House, contact Beverly Area Planning Association.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Save the Pike House group

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