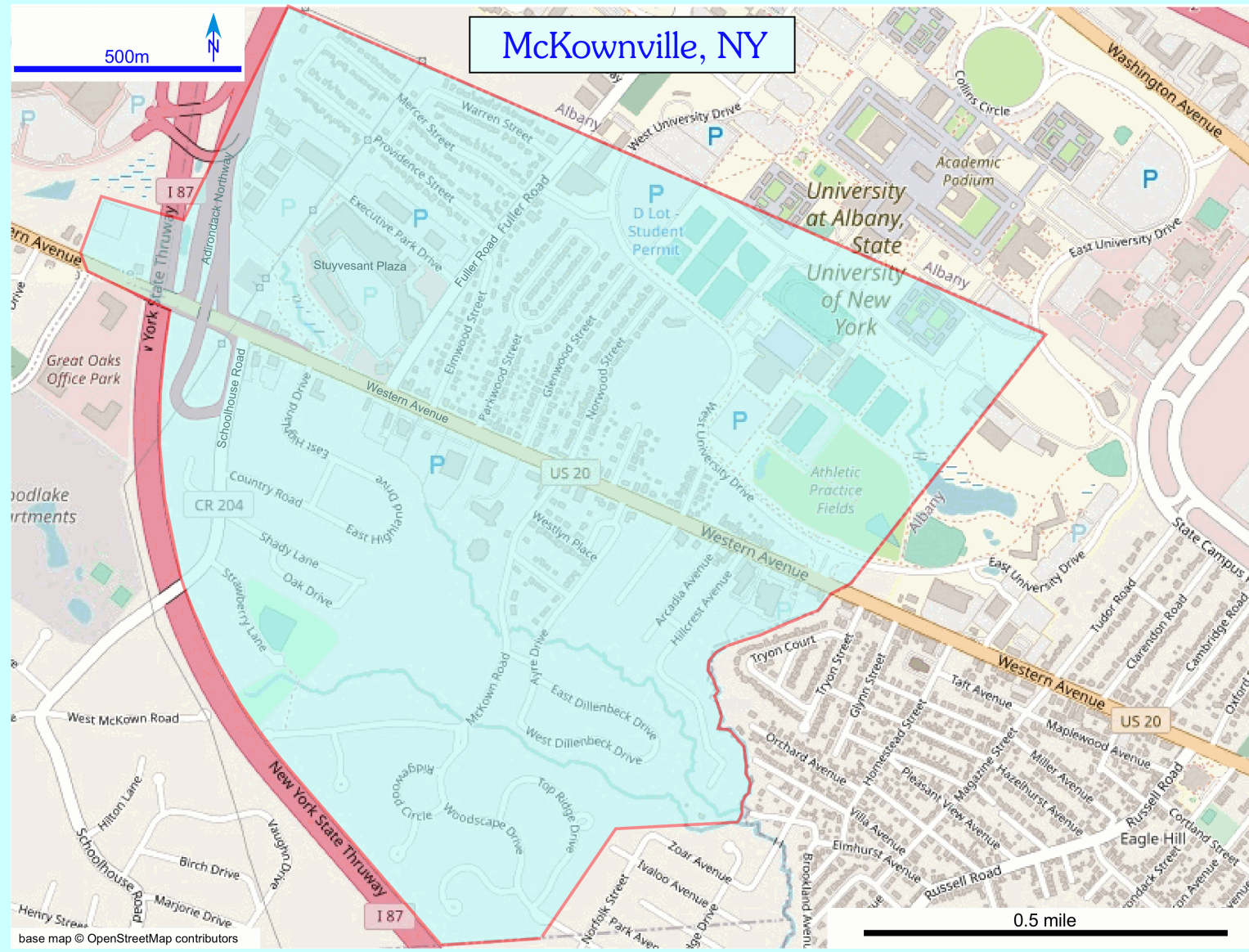


McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

presentation for the Guilderland Historical Society 21 April 2022

by Bill Kidd

a McKownville resident since 1982



McKownville -
a **residential**
neighborhood

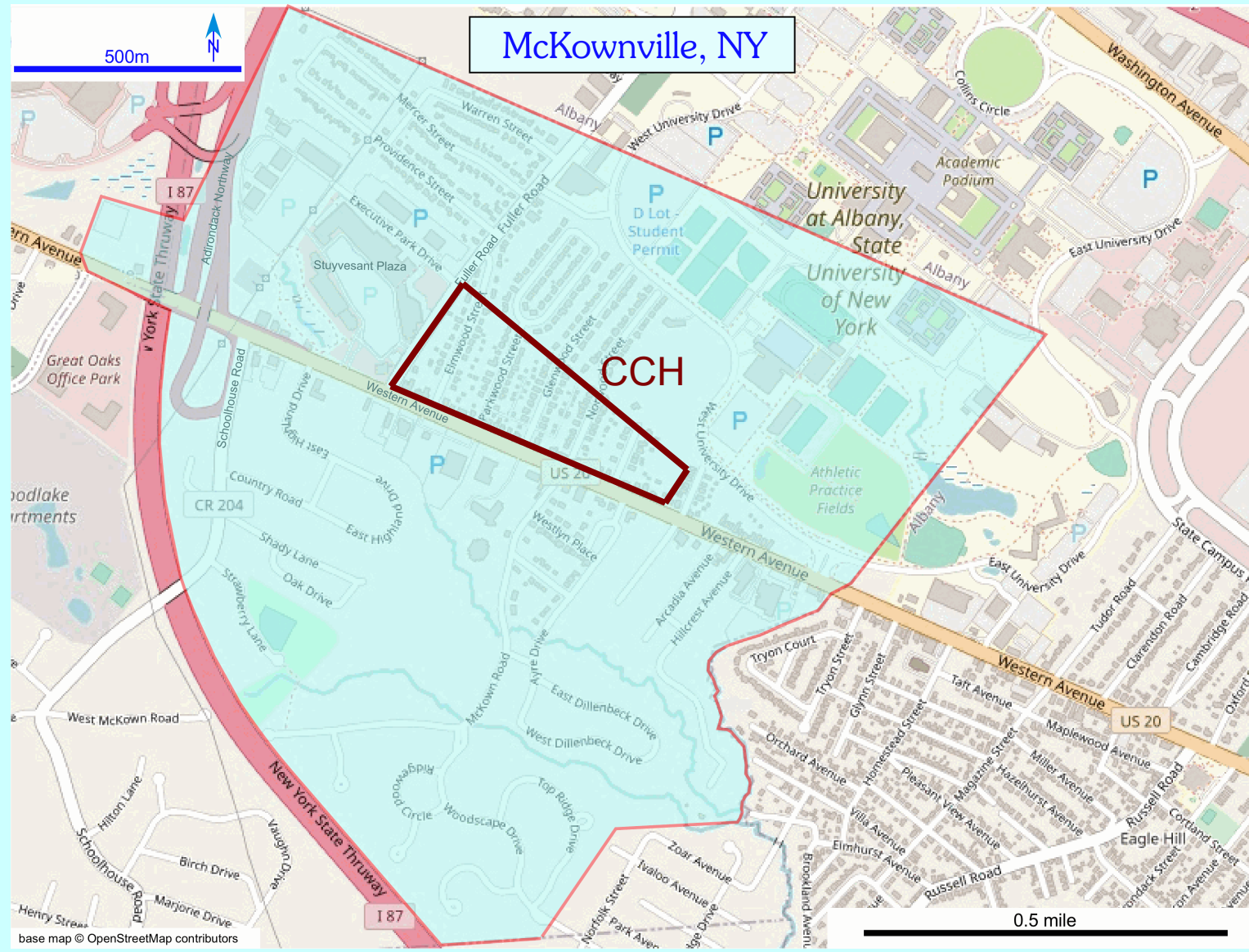
87% area
non-commercial

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

presentation for the Guilderland Historical Society 21 April 2022

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a McKownville resident since 1982



McKownville -
a **residential**
neighborhood

Thanks to
volunteer residents
and
NY SHPO staff

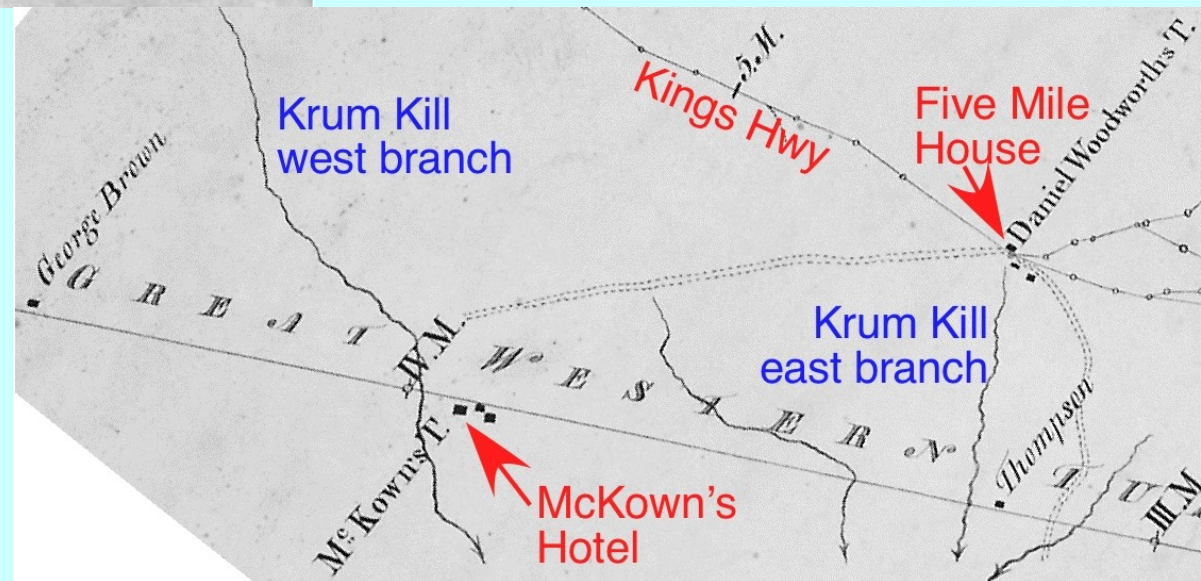
McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District



Hotel and tavern built c.1796-9
by William McKown
(1763-1843)
Town Supervisor 1813-24

picture c. 1916
burnt down October 1917
McKownville FD established
1918

Randel map 1805 also
shows the tavern rented
by William McKown
from 1786-1808; the
“Five Mile House”



McKownville in 19th century

1188 Western Ave built c. 1830

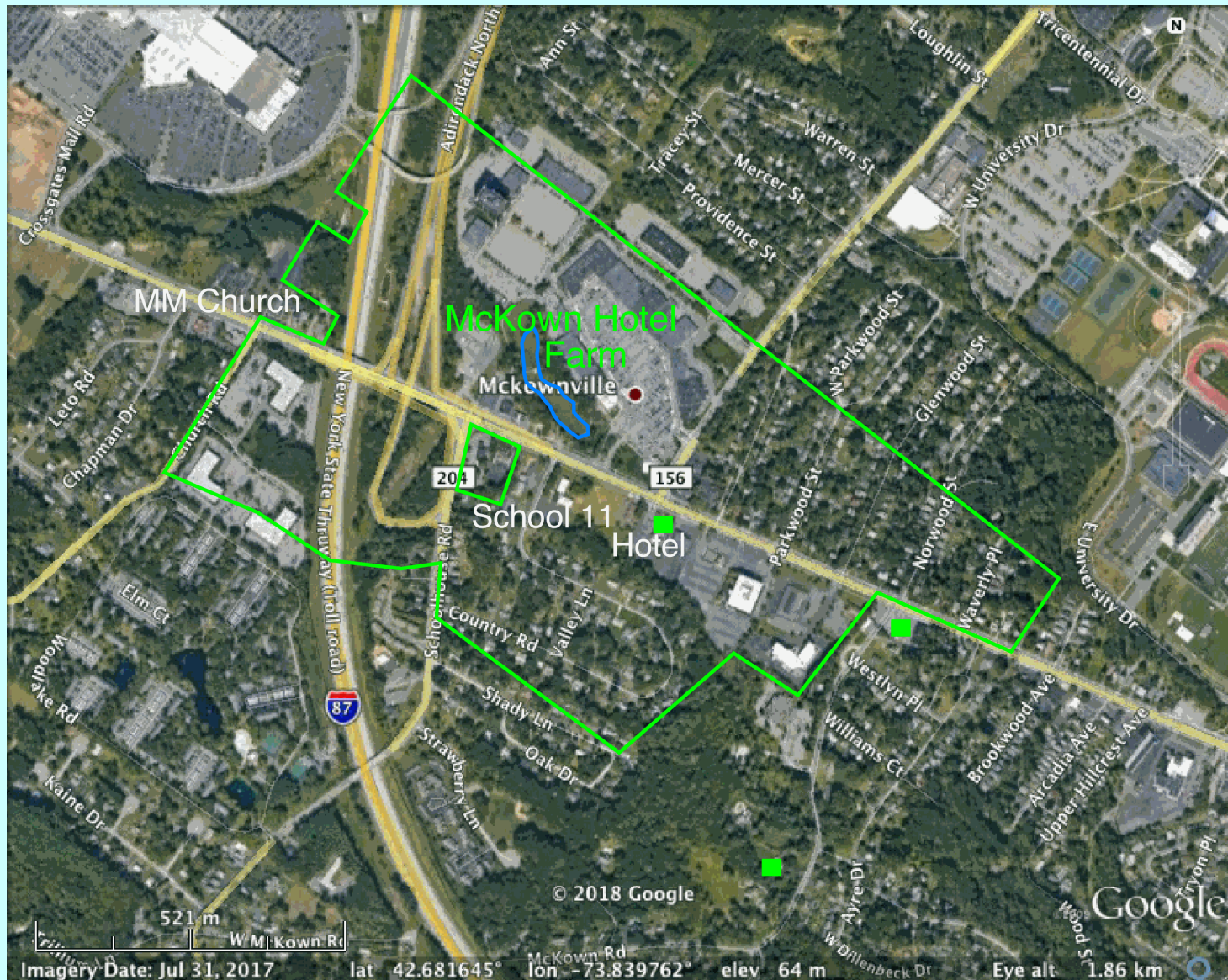
William Amsdell, brewer, lived here 1834-1864
(1796-1864)

1245 Western Ave built c. 1840

Eli Warford, farmer, lived here 1849-1861

1851 Sidney map

McKown Hotel Farm sold to William H Witbeck in 1907 (he rented the hotel 1884-1907)



184 acres purchased from heirs of William J McKown (1811-1879)

William H Witbeck subdivision



Witbeck began to sell lots in 1909, mostly in a residential subdivision of 35 acres north of Western, east of Fuller – “Country Club Highlands”

nearby contemporary developments

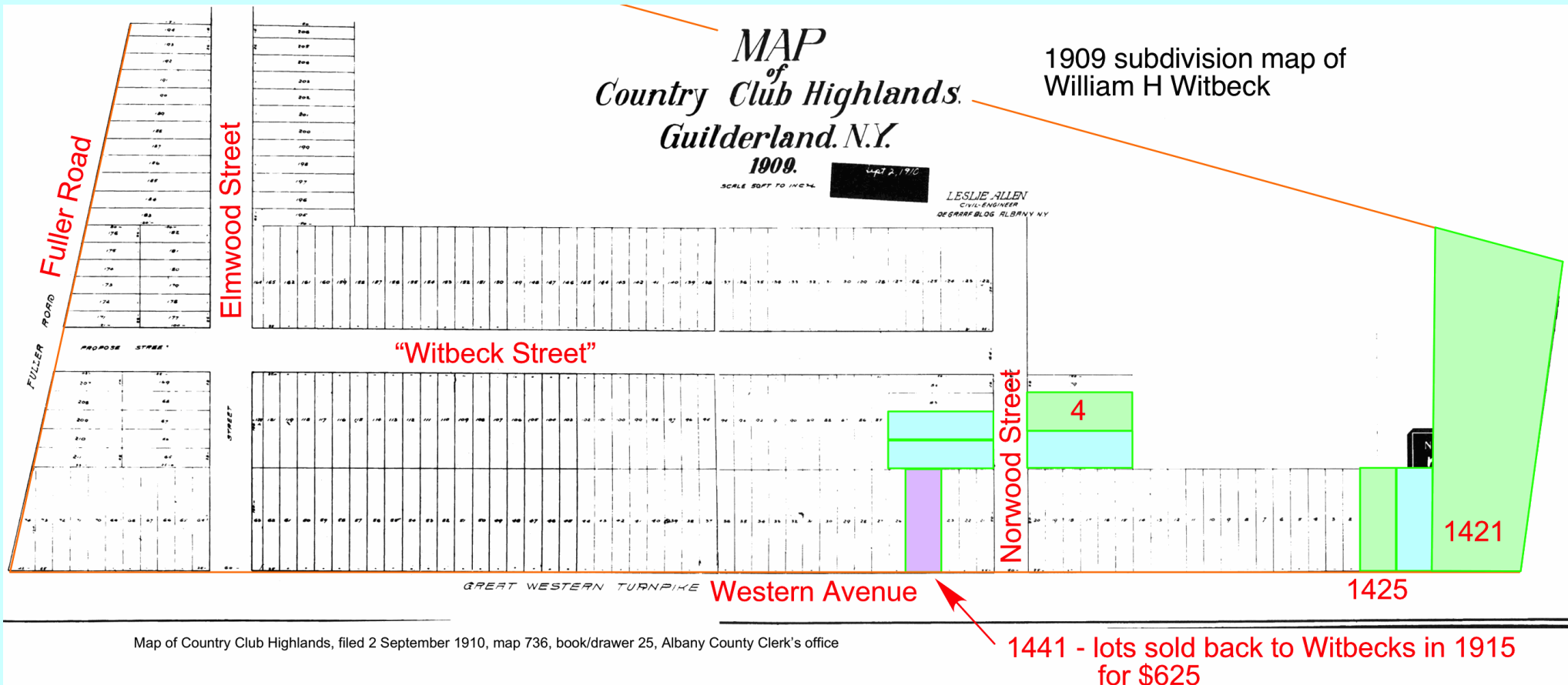


Other nearby areas were also developed during the same general time interval as most of Country Club Highlands (~1909-1940)

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

first subdivision 1909

before December 1912
6 plots sold, ~3 houses built



McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

4 Norwood Street

built **1911**

first owners:

Francis & Catherine Rich

linotype operator
(1915 census)

lived here 1911-1919

a Sears kit house

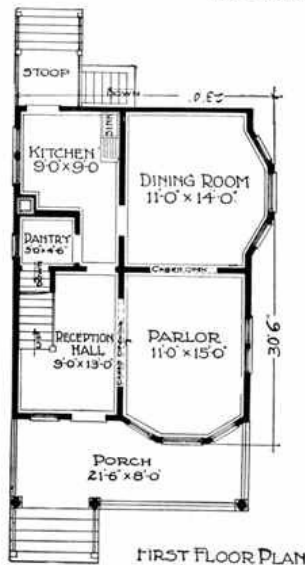


1912 Sears catalog

\$753⁰⁰



MODERN HOME No. 167



For \$753.00 we will furnish all the material to build this Eight-Room House, consisting of Mill Work, Flooring, Ceiling, Siding, Finishing Lumber, Building Paper, Pipe, Gutter, Sash Weights, Hardware, Painting Material, Lumber, Lath and Shingles. **NO EXTRAS**, as we guarantee enough material at the above price to build this house according to our plans.

By allowing a fair price for labor, cement, brick and plaster, which we do not furnish, this house can be built for about \$1,573.00, including all material and labor.

For Our Offer of Free Plans See Page 3.

A WELL proportioned house which affords a great deal of room at a low cost. Large front porch, 21 feet 6 inches long by 8 feet wide, with Colonial columns. Bay window in the dining room and parlor. An octagon tower on the second floor, making it suitable for a corner lot. Crystal leaded front window in the parlor. Colored leaded art glass sash for the hall, with marginal light attic sash. Every room in the house is perfectly lighted and well ventilated by large windows. The reception hall contains an open staircase with a cased opening between it and the parlor, and another cased opening leading to the dining room. A door also opens from the reception hall directly into the kitchen. Inside cellar stairs directly under the main stairs and also an outside stairway under the rear porch. When reaching the second floor landing you are within a very few feet of the entrance to the three bedrooms or bathroom. By this you will notice there is no waste space whatever.

Dublin front door, 3x7 feet, glazed with bevel plate glass. Interior yellow pine doors for both first and second floor, with clear yellow pine trim, such as casing, baseboard and molding. Clear yellow pine flooring for both floors and porches.

Painted two coats outside; color to suit. Varnish and wood filler for two coats of interior finish.

Built on a concrete block foundation, frame construction, sided with narrow bevel cypress edge siding and has a cedar shingle roof.

Excavated basement under the entire house, 7 feet from floor to joists, with cement floor. First floor, 9 feet from floor to ceiling; second floor, 8 feet from floor to ceiling.

This house can be built on a lot 28 feet wide.

Complete Warm Air Heating Plant, for soft coal, extra.....	\$ 78.05
Complete Warm Air Heating Plant, for hard coal, extra.....	80.54
Complete Steam Heating Plant, extra.....	173.49
Complete Hot Water Heating Plant, extra.....	206.72
Complete Plumbing Outfit, extra.....	117.27

**SEARS, ROEBUCK
AND CO.**



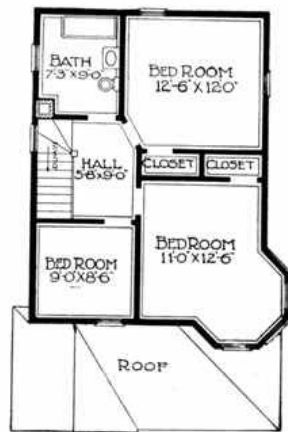
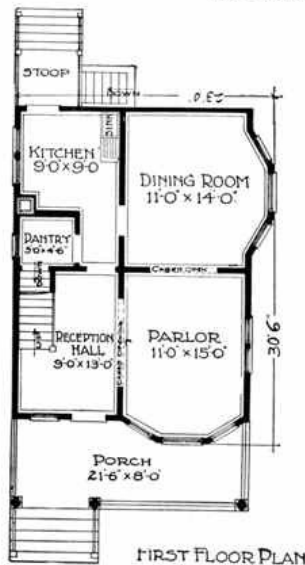
**CHICAGO,
ILLINOIS**

1912 Sears catalog

\$753⁰⁰



MODERN HOME No. 167



—47—

For \$753.00 we will furnish all the material to build this Eight-Room House, consisting of Mill Work, Flooring, Ceiling, Siding, Finishing Lumber, Building Paper, Pipe, Gutter, Sash Weights, Hardware, Painting Material, Lumber, Lath and Shingles. NO EXTRAS, as we guarantee enough material at the above price to build this house according to our plans.

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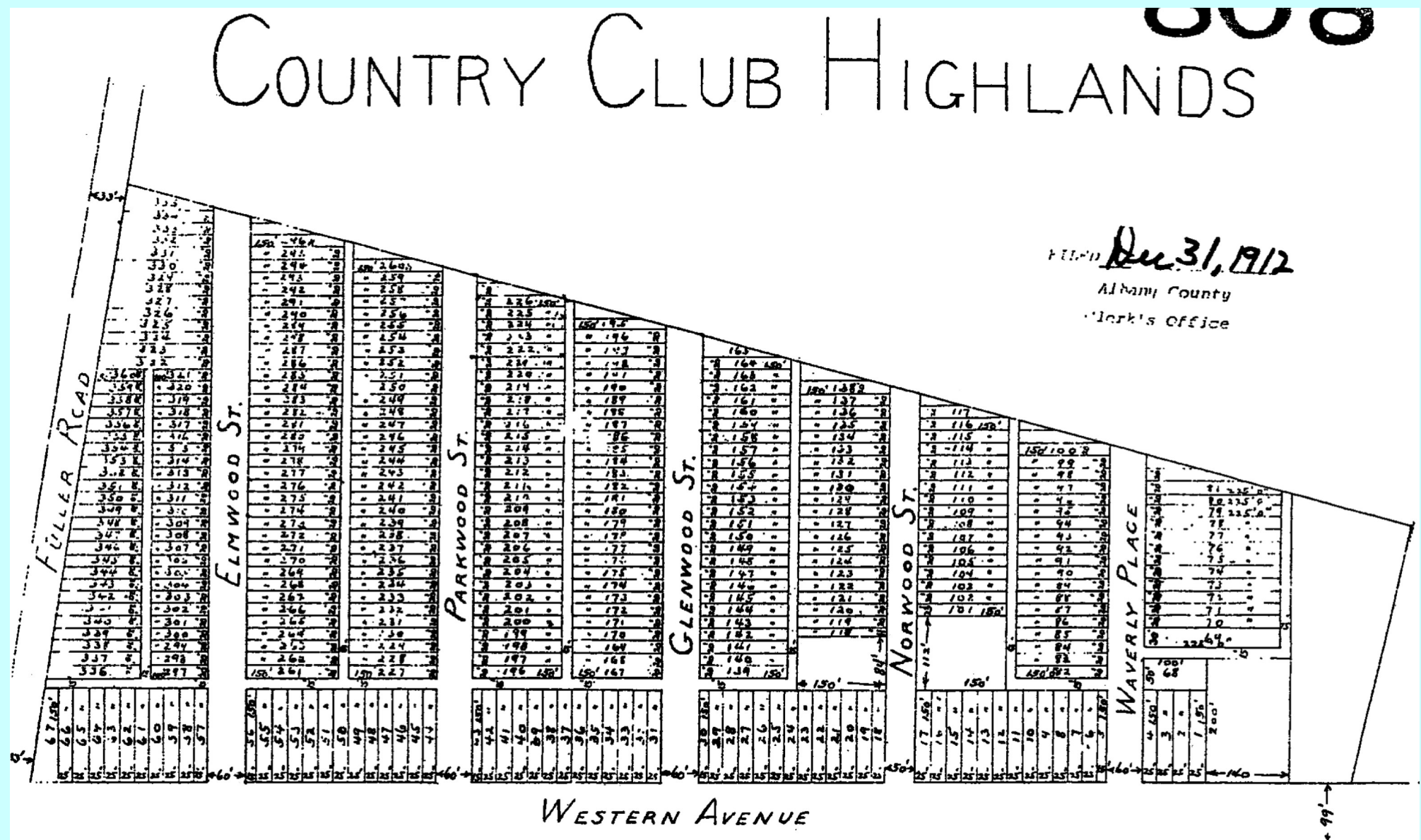
AND CO.

GUARANTEED

ILLINOIS

says labor, cement, brick and plaster would cost about \$820 – with lots \$625 – total ~\$2200 (~\$63,000 in 2022)

In 1912, William H Witbeck sold the "Country Club Highlands" to a partnership of his eldest son Benjamin F Witbeck and a principal of the American Locomotive Works in Schenectady, Arthur F Pitkin. The Pitkin-Witbeck partnership redesigned the subdivision substantially



Pitkin was probably a **necessary source of funding**, having become a rich young man on his father's death in 1905. Benjamin F Witbeck met him working at American Locomotive. We think Pitkin provided most of the \$25,000 mentioned here:

Home Building Corporation.
The Country Club Highlands Home Building corporation, of McKnownville, Albany county, was incorporated yesterday with the secretary of State, with a capital of \$25,000 to deal in real estate. The directors are Arthur P. Pitkin, of Schenectady, and William H. Witbeck and Benjamin F. Witbeck, of Albany.

The Argus (Albany NY) 1912-10-19 p4

Country Club Highlands Home Building Corp. appears in none of the lot sale deeds.

So, the inference is that it was just the vehicle used to pay for the **water and drainage system installation** and for **street and alley (both dirt), and sidewalk construction** (?and pay off loans for the property purchase)

FOR SALE—Lots at Country Club Highlands, on Western avenue, five minutes from car line, with **water, electric light, drainage, telephone service** and insurance rates the same as in the city, taxes average about ten percent of city taxes. **Reasonable restrictions.** Sold on easy terms from one hundred and fifty to six hundred and fifty dollars each. House built on same terms.

W.L. Hill & Co., 78 State st., or W.H. Witbeck, on plot
Advertisement, Times-Union (Albany, NY), 26 June 1914.



trolley on Western Ave, c.1920
view W from near Manning Blvd

the trolley line was
extended to the city
boundary in 1910

the automobile was
becoming more
affordable

Revised Map of Country Club Highlands, McKownville, filed 31 December 1912 showing the alleys as originally planned (in red ==)

The alley between Elmwood Street and Fuller Road was later shifted 50 ft west as shown in Second revised map of Country Club Highlands, (in orange ==) filed 21 November 1928

808

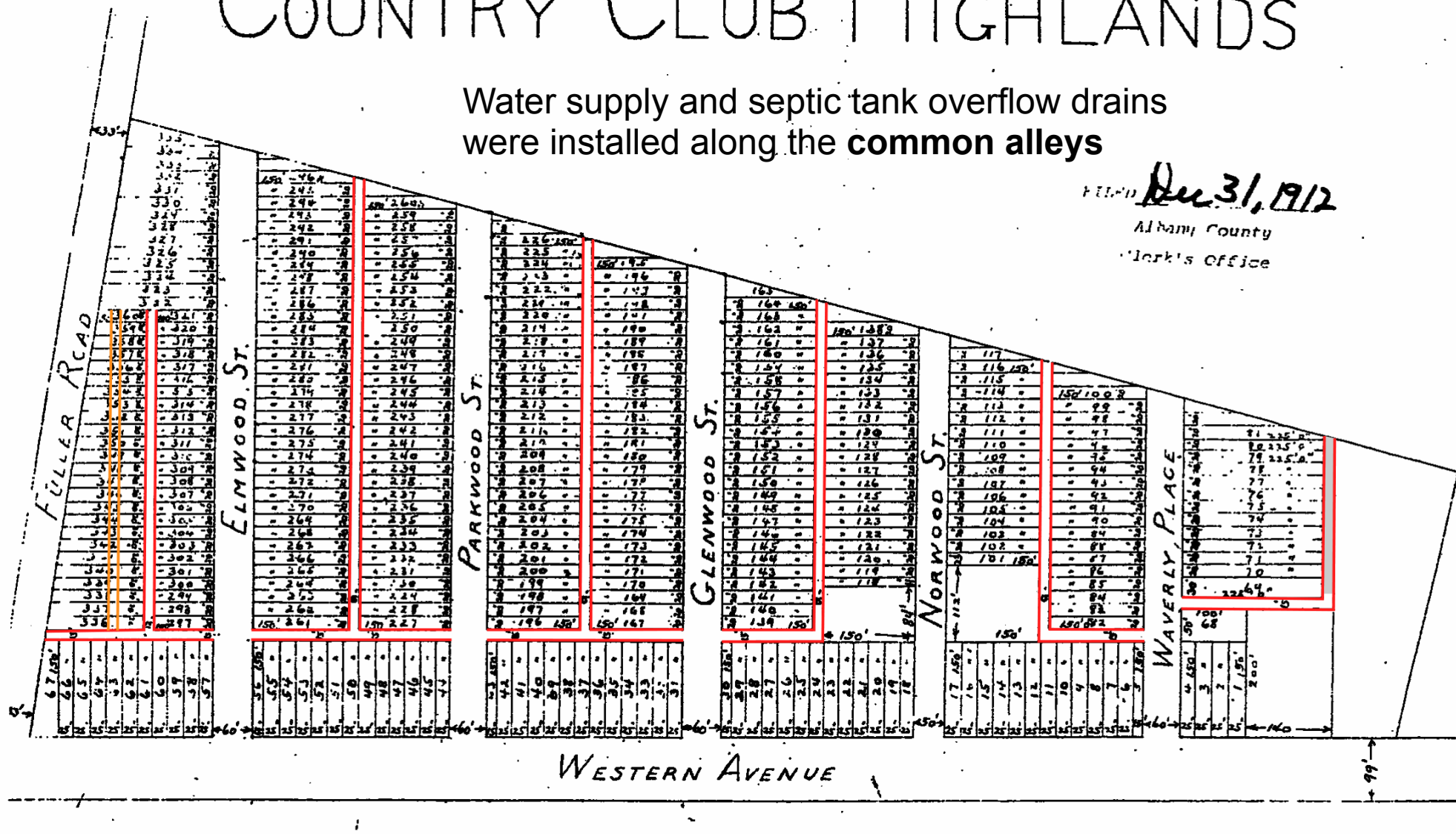
COUNTRY CLUB HIGHLANDS

Water supply and septic tank overflow drains were installed along the **common alleys**

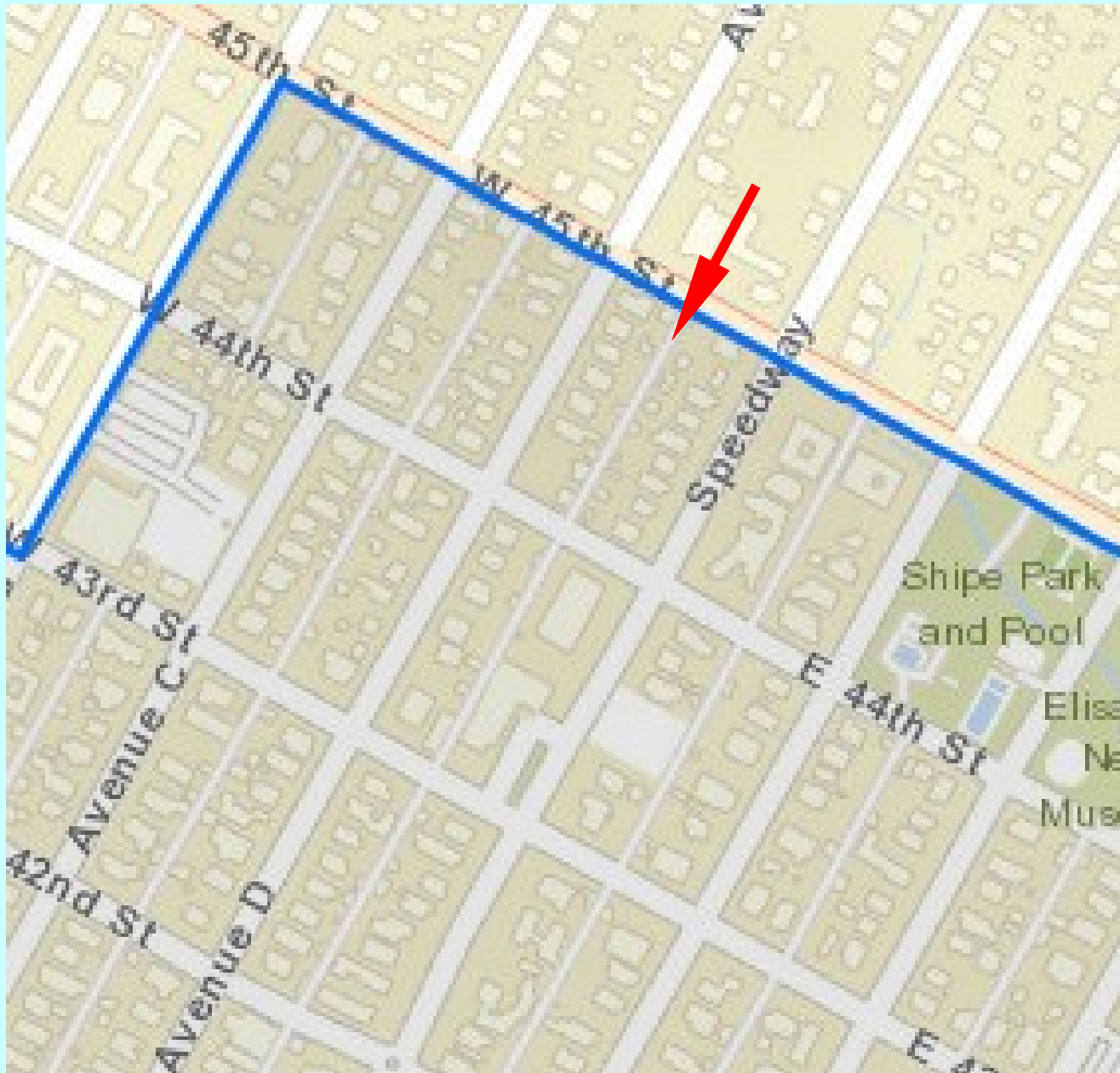
FILED Dec 31, 1912

Albany County

Clark's Office



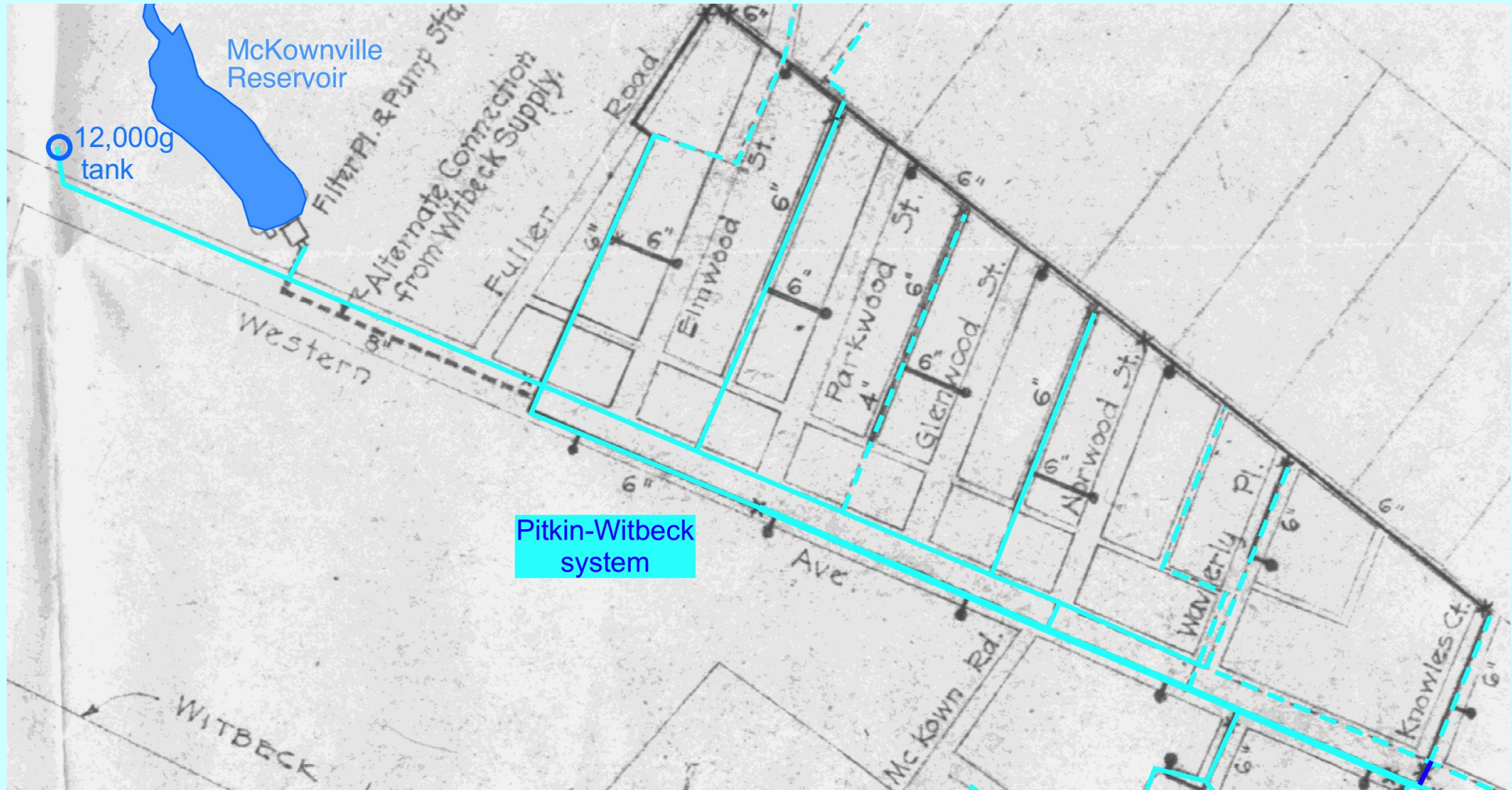
Austin TX – Hyde Park Historic District (registered 1990)
alleys through most blocks; lots a bit shorter than in CCHighlands



alleys like this are
abundant in Chicago

McKownville water supply – Pitkin-Witbeck system

1912-1947 - source from McKownville Reservoir

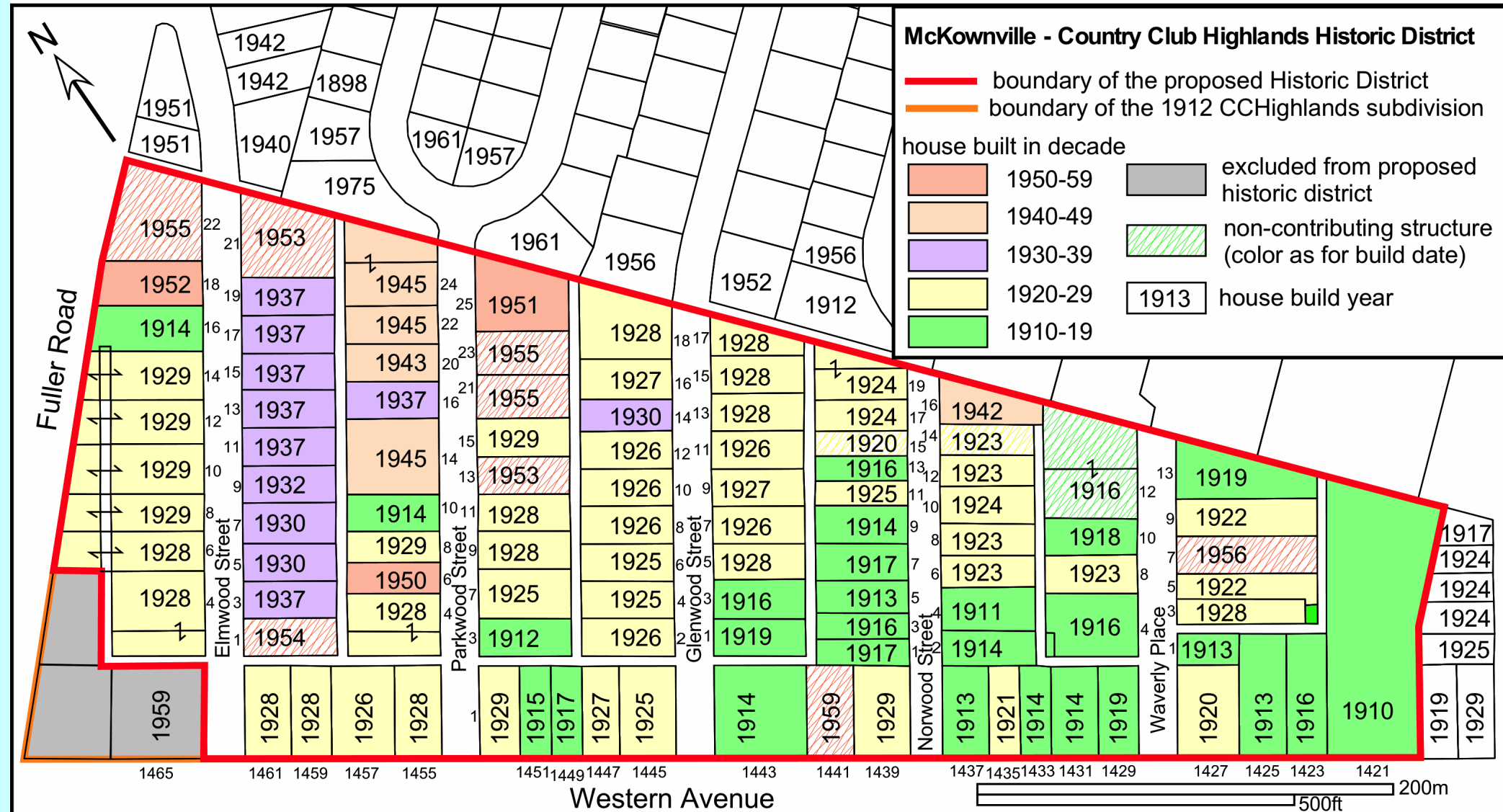


"I wonder if [he] can remember how horrible that water was. My mother used to tie cloth flour sacks over the faucets in an attempt to filter it. The sacks would soon be muddy yellow and so would the clothes she washed." Newton Ronan (1983) on McKownville water in 1920-40's

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

- 105 houses built from 1910-1959

94 of them are “contributing structures”



links to this map and other detailed information can be found here:

<https://mckownville.org/2projects/2nrhplaces/MIA-CCHighlandsNRHP-ix1.html>

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

10 Waverly Place (1918)
– a Foursquare

built by William C Witbeck, youngest son
of William H; he built 6 of the houses in
the Historic district



this was the parsonage
of the McKownville
Methodist Church
1919-1968

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

6 Norwood St (1923)
an Arts & Crafts Bungalow

built by Harold J Blessing; he built 17 of
the houses in the Historic district



this house was first owned
1923-26
by Frederick Siebel
editorial cartoonist for the
Knickerbocker Press

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

1445 Western Avenue (1926)
Colonial Revival style house

builder unknown



first owner
Maria Donehue
(picture 1929)
then her daughter
Mae Ryan
then granddaughter
Jane Ryan, to 1975

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

8 Glenwood St (1926)
Spanish Mission style house

builder ?Melillo & Sons



first owner
Mary G Frederick
1926 - after 1966

medical office
secretary/administrator

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

2 Glenwood St (1926)
Dutch Colonial style house

builder Harold J Blessing



first owners
Orvis & Edith Brenenstuhl
1926 - 1946

doctor

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

some sample houses

16 Elmwood St (1914)
Arts & Crafts bungalow

builder unknown



first owners
Ernest & Elizabeth Moore
1914 - 1918

chauffeur;
manager Lenox Lunch
(3 Central Ave)

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

houses of the developers – they lived in their development!

1443 Western Ave (1914)
large Arts & Crafts style

builder unknown



Benjamin F Witbeck
(d.1942)
& Caroline Witbeck
1914 - 1960

developers of Country
Club Highlands
mechanical engineer
businessman

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

houses of the developers – they lived in their development!

1421 Western Ave (1910)
Arts & Crafts style

builder unknown



William H & Selinia
Witbeck

(d.1935; 1919)

1910 – 1935

hotel proprietor,
first developer of Country
Club Highlands

Arthur & Mary Witbeck

1935 - 1957

automobile dealer

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

one other entertaining employment.....

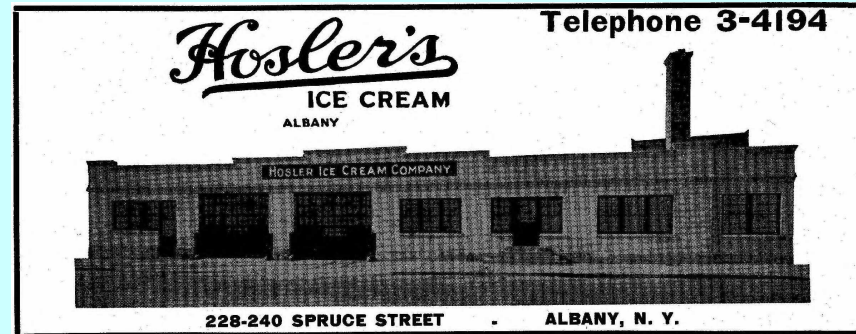
on Elmwood Street in the 1930's and 1940's,
three residents were in three different ice cream businesses!

George Levens

4 Elmwood

VP/managing director

Hoslers Ice Cream



Byron Snowden

8 Elmwood

transport manager

Fro-Joy Ice Cream (Schenectady)

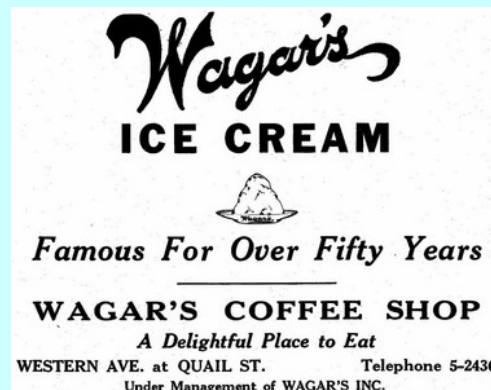


Roger Briggs

10 Elmwood

plant manager

Wagars Ice Cream



city directory adverts
1940; 1935; 1940

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District Deed Restrictions

William H Witbeck (1909-1912)

the Pitkin-Witbeck partnership (1912-1925)

the Pitkin-Witbeck Realty Company (1925-1929)

Caroline Witbeck (1929-1940)

Emma Van Loan, or Mary Witbeck (1940-1950)

McKown Farm Realty Co (1950-1961)

the four daughters of Benjamin & Caroline Witbeck (1961-)

all original deeds to lots from these various successive legal entities
have restrictions of the same general content:

No intoxicating liquors to be sold

No business or manufacturing to be carried on on said premises

***No building to be erected other than a one family dwelling house
and appurtenances***

***minimum cost of the house, and defined setback from the lot front
which vary depending on the location, and the date of the deed***

And...said covenants...to be continuous and running with the land

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District Deed Restrictions



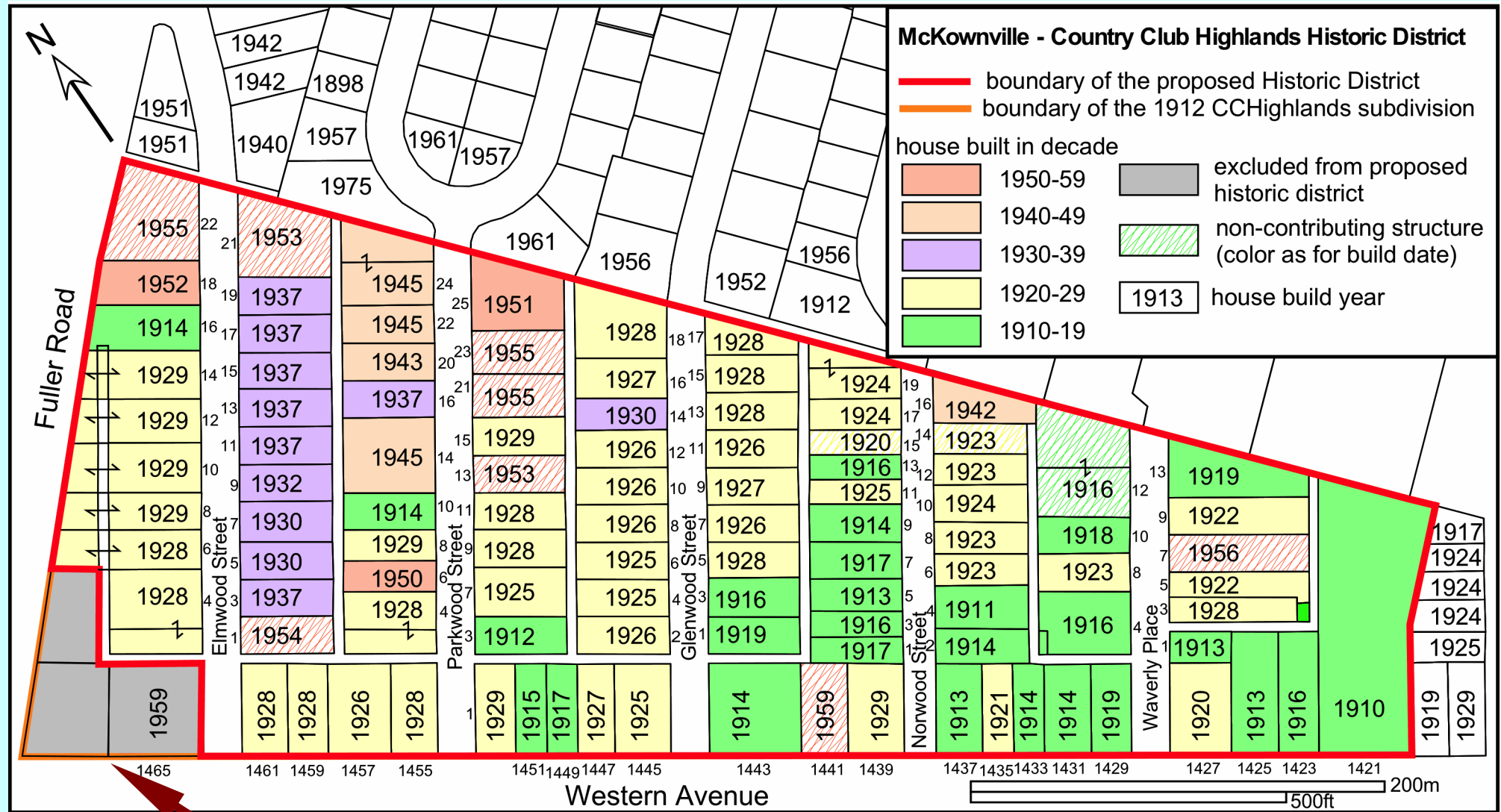
Elmwood St

before the existence of any zoning code, this was the only way to
keep the development residential
and to
maintain the desired character of the houses and neighborhood

and this was sustained until.....the later 1950's when Guilderland
got it's first zoning code, and did so at least in part because of
activism by the McKownville Improvement Association

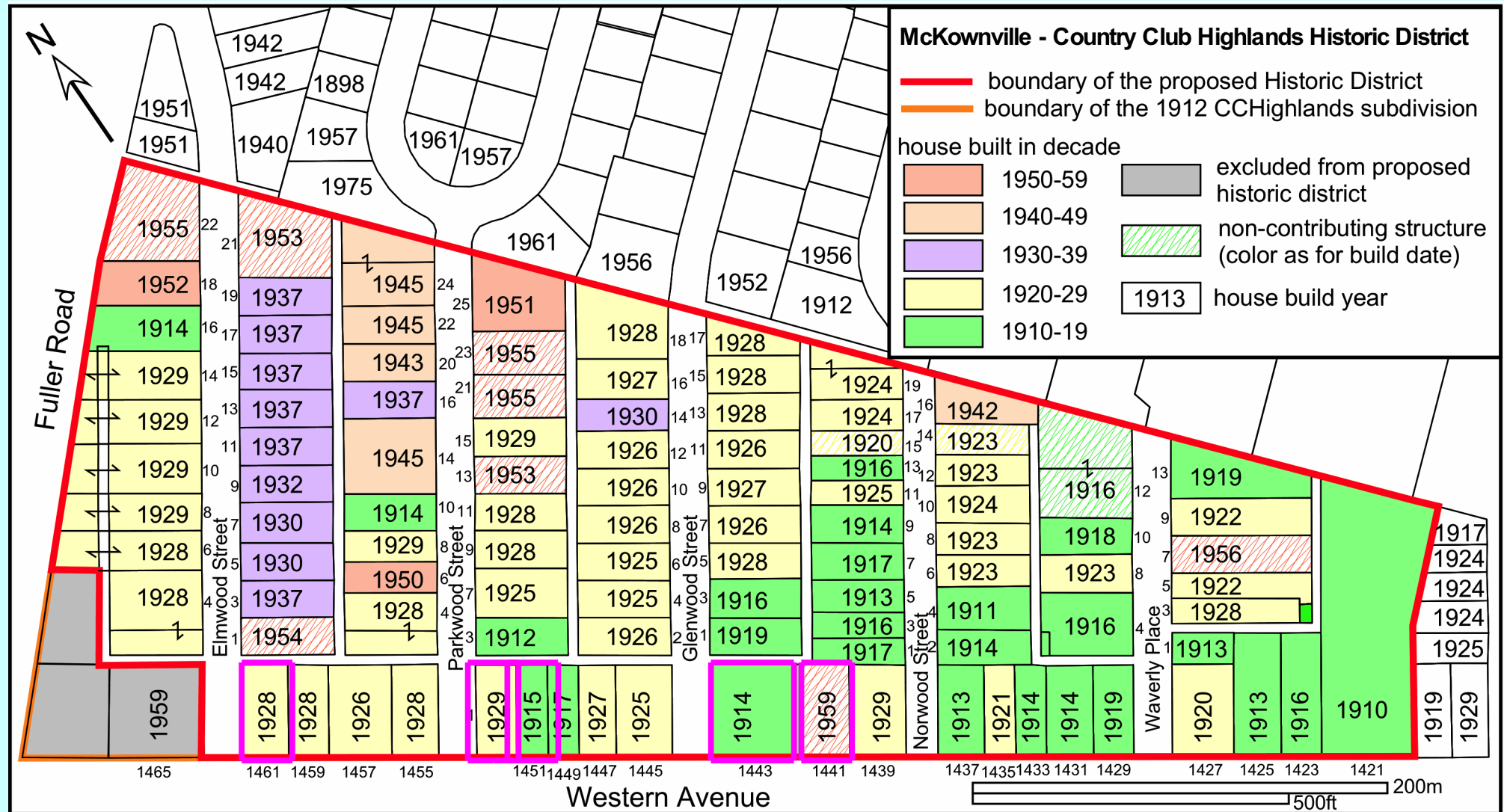
McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District

Violations of Deed Restrictions



lots sold 1955-1960 all with residential restrictions; 1960 used for owner's real estate business zoning to business requested 1960; plan for diner opposed by residents but zoning change granted; from 1963 several doctors and a dentist listed; 1974 another zoning change 344 Fuller

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District later attempts at Violation of Deed Restrictions and zoning



several doctors attempted to use three houses on Western Avenue for medical offices in the 1972-74 interval; a dentist the same in another house 2003-4; another now? residents and the Improvement Association beat this threat by sustained protest

McKownville-Country Club Highlands Historic District the result of Violation of residential Deed Restrictions



“they make a desert,
and call it peace”

344 Fuller Road

McKownville recreation up to 1950

just across Western Avenue from Country Club Highlands

McKown Grove opened 1896 by William McKown (1842-1924)
picnics, clambakes, swimming, dancing, baseball

purchased 1926 by William J & Margaret Knowles
added roller skating, jalopy racing 1938-40



1958 photo

McKOWN GROVE

WESTERN AVENUE, ALBANY

**SURPRISE DANCES AND PRIZE WALTZ
SATURDAY EVENING**

MUSIC BY POPULAR BANDS

DANCING — Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday Evenings

MERRY-GO-ROUND
BATHING — PONY TRACK — REFRESHMENTS
CATERERS TO PICNICS, CLAMBAKES, ETC.

PHONE ALBANY 2-6612. WILLIAM J. KNOWLES, Prop.

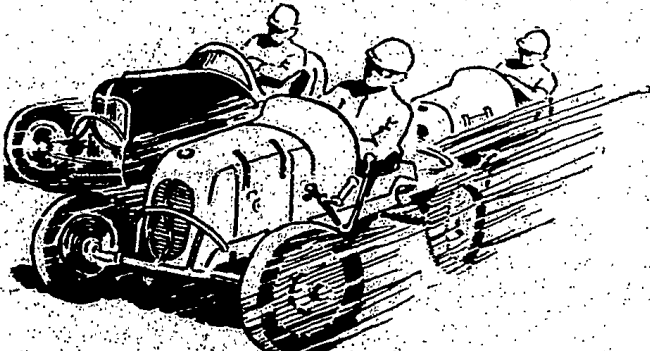
1934 advert

McKownville recreation up to 1950

McKown Grove
jalopy racing 1938-40

this was not greatly popular
in the McKownville neighborhood
because of the noise

not to mention occurring on
Sundays.....



Jalopy Races

Every Saturday and Sunday
McKOWN'S GROVE
WESTERN AVENUE ALBANY, N. Y.

STARTING, JULY 13th

Spills and Thrills — Fun For All

Adults 40c Children 25c

FREE PARKING

1940 advert

McKownville recreation up to 1950

neighborhood baseball

William H Witbeck promoted a local baseball team from 1897 to about 1910, playing in part of McKown Grove

in the 1930's Benjamin F Witbeck provided a field Witbeck Park on the south side of Western Avenue for the McKownville Arcadians, and Oak Ebel's All-Stars



In 1950 Caroline Witbeck sold that area and it was built over by the Tom Sawyer Motor Inn; the Arcadians disbanded

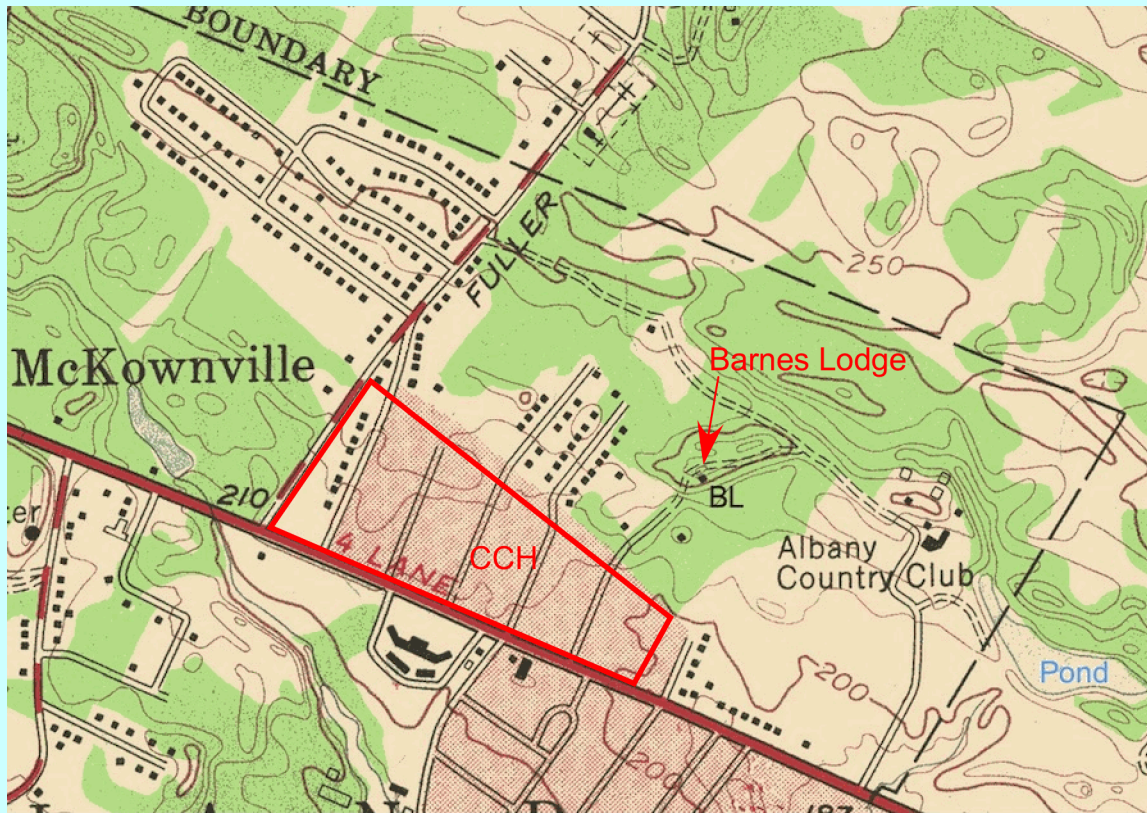
The Barnes Lodge and William Barnes



1966 photo

Barnes had this built in 1909
[Marcus Reynolds, architect]
a “country” retreat

Barnes was the NY State and
Albany county Republican
“boss” - a political fixer of the
first order



He sold this in 1920,
following his political eclipse
in the Republican party

This is still on the National
Register of Historic Places
even though destroyed after
a fire in 1985

1953 USGS map

William Barnes (of McKownville) vs. Teddy Roosevelt

SOME MORE HIDE-BOUND DELEGATES

WILLIAM BARNES, OF MCKOWN-
VILLE, HEADS LIST FROM
THIRD ALBANY DISTRICT.

Two More Bunches of Barnes Repub-
lican Officeholders and Machine
Men Chosen to Represent
County at State Conven-
tion.

Republican delegates to the Second and Third Assembly district conventions met in Albany and Cohoes city halls last night and elected eight delegates to the State convention from the second and seven from the Third district, with William Barnes, of McKownville (erstwhile of Albany), heading the third district coterie. They are all holders of county or city or other public offices or officers in the Barnes Republican organization with but two or three exceptions. They are perfectly safe, well trained and house broken and will follow Mr. Barnes, of McKownville, even to a bolt from the convention.

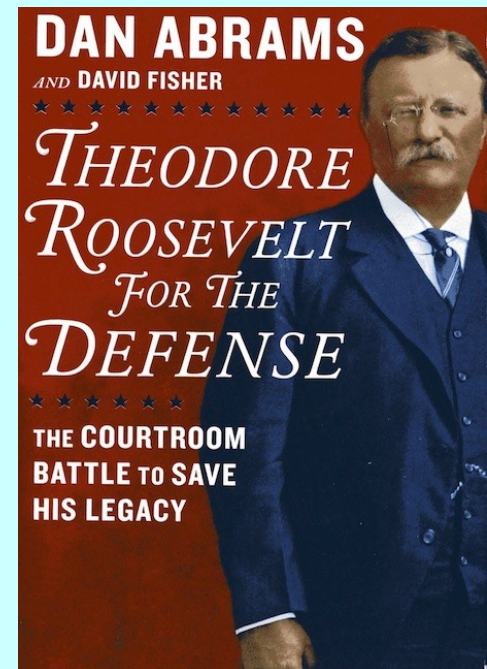
The Argus (Albany NY) 1914-08-13

Barnes in 1915 made the mistake of suing Teddy Roosevelt for libel, demanding \$50,000. After a six-week jury trial, held in Syracuse, he lost the case.

The jury were convinced by Roosevelt's published claims of political corruption in Albany and NY State, and collusion in this between Barnes and Murphy the Democratic boss. The jury also must have been convinced that Barnes repeatedly lied in court.

this book gives much detail on the case and its background

(~\$1.4 million equivalent in 2022)



Acknowledgements

McKownville history

Fred Abele
Mary Ellen Johnson
Alice Begley
Arthur Gregg
William Mohr
William Embler
William Efner
Steve Rider
reporters of
The Turnpike Record
Altamont Enterprise

Guilderland Historical Society

Don Reeb and previous officers of the
McKownville Improvement Association

Country Club Highlands Historic District

Don Reeb for initiating the process
Ellen Manning for project coordination
Bill Meehan for taking the house photos
Sue Anderson & Bill Kidd for
documentary research
Bill Krattinger and James Carter of the
NY SHPO for creating the description
document, and for project supervision
Ken Runion, Peter Barber (Town of
Guilderland supervisors) for support

for more on McKownville, please access
home page - mckownville.org
mckownville.org/MIAhistory.html

In future we hope more buildings and sections of McKownville may be added to the Register of Historic Places

