

## **A Home for Village Administration**

Winnetka's Village Hall has stood with dignity across from the Elm Street Station Park for the past ninety years. Its stone exterior, its symmetry and the pleasing proportions of its Georgian Revival style have served as the welcoming face of this community.

Positioned in the heart of our community, Village Hall stands west of the tracks prepared for Winnetka's future growth, but faces east in honor of its earliest times.

### **Early times**

In early times Village administration was a comparatively limited operation conducted by the village council out of a small train station. After this structure burned down in the early 1870s, destroying the village records with it, the council moved into the new, larger train station. In 1900 the old Academy Hall building, located on the site of today's fire station, was renovated to house village administration offices plus the fire and police departments.

By 1915, however, calls were heard for a new administration building that would both serve growing village needs but also make a positive statement about the people of Winnetka and their government. After the war a sketch was circulated of a proposed brick structure, but many issues needed to be resolved. Where would it be located? Which village functions would it house? It would take the Plan of Winnetka to answer those questions.

### **A home of its own**

In the Plan of Winnetka, published in 1921, the new Village Hall was a key element in the design of the village. Its architect studied various sites, including east and south of the Elm street station. But he recommended locating the important structure west of the station as it would be less disruptive to current businesses and more conducive to the development of a Community Center around it. The Plan's designs also called for a separate fire station south of the new Village Hall.

After a few years acquiring the properties, in 1924 the Village held a competition, open only to Winnetka architects, for designs for the new building. A three-judge panel of distinguished architects chose the design submitted by Edward H. Clark in February 1925. Clark was already noted as architect for the Lincoln Park Aquarium and Field House, as well as the University Club in Evanston.

Within days the selection was ratified by Village Council. Within weeks construction began. And in January 1926 the Village administration and police departments moved into their new home.

By March Winnetka was ready to hold dedication ceremonies for the newly christened "Village Hall". With all the fanfare this community could muster it lauded the new landmark, remembered its past, and honored the dedication of those who worked for years to make it a reality. Five hundred residents crowded into Village Hall to tour the facilities and hear the speeches on this historic day.

### **Ship of State**

Perhaps the next time you visit Village Hall, take a moment to look up at its roof. Above the slate shingles and the symmetrical chimneys, you will find a cupola. Its clock has kept time and its bells have tolled the hour for the past ninety years. And soaring above the cupola you will find a weather vane in the form of a schooner. This represents Winnetka's ship of state. It has been sailing confidently, whether in a train station or a stately stone building, since 1869.

Edward H. Clark's sketch of his winning design for Winnetka's new Village Hall. He referred to it as "a simple early Eighteenth Century Anglo-Classic type executed in stone and designed for a village, rather than as a Monumental City hall." PHOTO COURTESY WINNETKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

