

Courts and Parkways

It happened in 1938 and 1939. Charles S. Wanless bought and developed two parcels of land in the current Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Assn. boundaries as well as one on South Fourth St. immediately west of Staab Funeral Home. His action resulted in West Jackson Parkway being platted in 1938 and Walnut Court being platted in 1939. Presumably, South Fourth Street Court was platted around the same dates but isn't a topic for VHNA. The concept was patterned after similar courts/parkways in New Orleans, Louisiana.¹

According to local records, of fourteen residences within the West Jackson Parkway boundaries, two existed in 1917, ten were constructed between 1938 and 1941 and two were constructed after 1941. Of ten residences in Walnut Court, seven were constructed between 1939 and 1941 with three being constructed after 1941.²

On May 11, 1999 Walnut Street Court received the Springfield Block/Neighborhood Award with the following commendation:

“Walnut Street Court is the first recipient of the new Neighborhood/Block Award. This subdivision is typical of the several “court” developments, which appeared in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These were usually centered on a “common” green space and featured new, attractive Colonial Revival housing often in a pleasant, established city neighborhood. They were sometimes located on the site of an old mansion and its grounds. Walnut Street Court was one of three similar subdivisions developed by Springfield realtor Charles S. Wanless. The other two developments are West Jackson Parkway and South Fourth Street Court.”³

Regardless of the evolutions of surrounding areas, these courts and parkway have maintained their integrity over the past sixty years.

“Rejuvenation of the inner city with strategic placement of Green space should also be modeled after Jackson Parkway. The longevity, safety and desirability of these Jackson Parkway properties are irrefutable. This residential concept could be replicated in the Vinegar Hill, Enos Park, Ridgely and Aristocracy Hill Neighborhoods to encourage future redevelopment. Understandably, these neighborhoods may not return to the traditional families, but singles, couples without children, empty nesters and environmentalist minded individuals will find these areas attractive to relocate. There is a significant advantage to live close to where one works and that attraction is growing along with the cost and time savings from reducing daily travel. The future trends are undeniable, urbanization of the central city is the right direction that could make Springfield stand out and attract younger as well as baby boomers to relocate from other areas.”⁴

¹ Phillip Spengler; Wanless – Spengler, LTD, Springfield, Illinois

² Sangamon Valley Collection; Architecture Domestic – Springfield, Illinois -- West Jackson Parkway, Sanborn Map; Architecture Domestic – Springfield, Illinois – Walnut Court.

³ 7th Annual Mayor's Preservation Awards Program, May 11, 1999, Springfield, Illinois; courtesy Sangamon Valley Collection

⁴ “Central-City Inter-Governmental Cooperation”; Tony Leone, Pasfield House, Springfield, Illinois

How many large, empty, undeveloped lots can we count within Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association boundaries???