

Elawa Farm History

The Elawa Farm Group was built in 1917 for A. Watson Armour, a member of one of Chicago's oldest and most distinguished families, and is considered architecturally significant as a rare representative example of a Lake Forest gentleman's farm. It is also noteworthy for its fine design and for its association with two very significant architects: David Adler and Alfred Hopkins. Adler and Howard Van Doren Shaw are generally considered the North Shore's premier estate architects. Hopkins, a New York architect who is known to have designed only two farm groups in Illinois, is the acknowledged authority on estate farm complexes, and has been called the "unquestioned dean of Farm group architecture." Historically the farm group built for Armour was known as ELAWA FARM, a composite of ELsa and A. Watson Armour and subsequently as LeWa Farm, named for Lelia and Wallace Carroll, who purchased the property in 1954.

Because ELAWA FARM is a stunning representative example of estate farm architecture, because it is virtually unaltered, and because it is unique in Lake Forest, the buildings forming the main farm group have been preserved and adaptively reused.



A. WATSON ARMOUR

A. Watson Armour was a member of one of Chicago's oldest and most prestigious families, significant in the city's commercial development. A descendent of Philip D. Armour (1832-1901), who founded the meatpacking firm of Armour & Co. in 1875, A. Watson Armour was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1882, the son of Kirkland B. and Annie P. (Hearne) Armour. In 1907, he married Elsa Parker, and they had a daughter, Mrs. W. Irving Osborne and two sons, A. Watson III and Charles B. Armour. A. Watson Armour began in the meat packing business in 1903, becoming Vice President and Director of Armour & Co. in 1915. He remained active in the business until 1929. Armour also served as a trustee on several boards including Commonwealth Edison, Northern Trust, St. Luke's Hospital and the Chicago Council, Boy Scouts of America. Armour died in 1953.

ELAWA FARM

ELAWA FARM was the Armour's weekend home. The 1917 Book of Chicagoans lists their primary residence at 1200 Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. Two years earlier (at approximately the same time A. Watson Armour became Vice President of Armour & Co.) he started to build his country place, hiring David Adler as architect. A large home was drawn up by Henry Corwith Dangler (who was then working for David Adler and signed the firm's drawings since Adler was unlicensed). It was Georgian Colonial Revival and symmetrical, with two wings surrounding a front courtyard, similar in concept to the central section of the farm group. The house was meant to be constructed in what

has since been called the picnic grove, located where the existing road forks to the left off the drive to the farm group from Waukegan Road. It would have overlooked the Armour's 128 acres. This estate home was never built, though a picnic building was constructed; today a flagstone hearth is all that exists from that structure. The Armours began building their Lake Forest country estate in 1915, completing two gatehouses. When they abandoned the idea of the main house, they had David Adler design a garage and add a wing to each gatehouse, forming a courtyard. The family then lived in the twin houses. Their home's most unusual feature is a tunnel connecting the gatehouses so that household members need not go outside to travel between the two halves of their home in bad weather. Building permit #1631, dated March 18, 1936, indicates that David Adler was the architect to construct a tunnel from one cottage to another; the cost was to be \$2,000. (These buildings, a bit removed from the farm complex, continue to serve as a private single-family residence.)

The farm complex, along with a large formal garden to the east, was designed to be an important integral part of the estate and planned at about the same time the gatehouses were being built. Armour's personal interest in farming may have stemmed from his childhood. His father, Kirkland, helped develop the Hereford breed of cattle in the United States by purchasing pedigreed stock from the herd of the King of England, about 1900 to start herds on the Armour family farms in Missouri. Barry Carroll, who grew up on the property, recalls that A. Watson Armour kept horses at ELAWA FARM and had fourteen to sixteen of them in the stables. The Armours also raised laying hens in a one-story red brick chicken house said to have been designed by David Adler, located to the south and east of the silo. A 16 mm. family movie, made by Mr. Armour, shows cows grazing, chickens, horses pulling sleds and corn being threshed. Several metal signs, with farm families and playful farm animals cut into silhouette patterns, were illustrated in the film. One read "ELAWA FARM Gardens". There is a handsomely designed metal fence with similar silhouettes as well as an original lamppost, currently stored on the property. Mrs. John McGovern, granddaughter of A. Watson Armour, recalls visiting the farm often with great fondness. She said when she was a little girl she spent every weekend there. Her grandfather, she commented, loved farming; they had horses and sheep and a wonderful garden. The Carroll Family carried on the tradition of farming, continuing to raise Shetland ponies, turkeys, laying hens and Sicilian burros.

THE FARM'S ARCHITECTURE

The farm complex built for A. Watson Armour was designed by New York architect Alfred Hopkins, who was considered the leading expert on estate farms. These complexes, designed for estate or gentleman farms such as Armours, were called "farm groups" in contemporary journal articles and books. Farm group architecture was rural in character in the sense that it typically was built with a low orientation. At ELAWA FARM, for instance, the roof pitches are low and the buildings are joined by covered passageways. But the farm buildings constructed for country estates were not related architecturally to the typical farm. Buildings were not just set down anywhere as they sometimes are on Midwest farmsteads. Farm groups were generally architect designed and were often as distinguished as the estate house. Although it appears from material published on Hopkins and by him that he designed only two farm groups in Illinois--Armour's and one for Medill McCormick in Byron, Illinois--he designed many on the east coast, with fifteen on Long Island, including one for Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Hopkins felt that his farm groups should be both practical and artistic, and he received considerable critical praise for his work. An article on farm groupings published in the Architectural Record in 1915 notes Hopkins was often called upon to design farm buildings on estates where the residences were the work of other highly regarded architects (such as Bertram Goodhue, John Russell Pope and Charles Platt). This is the case here; Armour's residence was designed by David Adler. It goes on to say that Hopkins wrote extensively on the subject and that his book *Modern Farm Buildings* was one

of the leading works on this type of architecture. His book was considered the definitive treatise on the subject and had gone into three editions by 1920.

ELAWA FARM was planned following the practical requirements in his book on farm group design and reflects his philosophy on estate farming. It is laid out symmetrically, carefully designed to separate the necessary farming functions. For instance, hay storage was removed from its traditional loft over the stables to eliminate the infiltration of dust as well as the pollution of the hay by the foul air arising from below. Separate facilities for the storage of hay and feed and open sided sheds to house farm vehicles (such as the structure on the west side of the farm group at ELAWA FARM) were characteristic Hopkins features. Spatially his low-slung farm groups were always composed around several courtyards or paddocks, as they are at ELAWA FARM, thus allowing for the separation of cows and horses and for the ingenious integration of barnyard and stable functions. Hopkins' floor plans illustrate that ELAWA FARM was designed with four courtyards. The court labeled "central court" served as a paddock. The "south court" was accessed by an apartment at the south end of the group, four farmhands' rooms and four horse stalls. The "north court" was flanked by cow stables, an office and dairy and the rear of the machine room. The "wagon court," on the west side of the barn was gated on the south and on the north and was to accommodate vehicles. To the east was the complex with the barn in it; to the west was the wagon shed flanked by a pump house and ice house. Four brick piers marked the entrance to the wagon court. All of these elements at ELAWA FARM form a single complex, where every part, including the courtyards, are significant to the whole. Hopkins' plans don't show greenhouses or cold frames, which were located south of the south piers in the wagon court and were presumably later additions. There is no reference to a designer of these elements.

The Architectural Record of 1915 on Hopkins' farm groupings stated that artistic as well as practical concerns were to be taken into account when planning a farm group. Farm groups were intended to please the eye, and Hopkins' design for the Armour estate was stylistically beautiful. It was built in the Georgian Colonial Revival style, of red brick and the wood trim was white. An elegant simplicity governs the design, and indeed, a reticence in the use of ornament characterizes Hopkins' work. But the simplicity should not be deceptive; the farm group has carefully disciplined classical detailing like other Georgian Colonial Revival structures. Classical' features include its overall symmetry, with wings flanking the two story barn and gated paddock, as well as specific design features. Among the Classical details are the slender cupola with a wind vane and clock that tops the gable roof of the barn, pediments over the grand arched center entrance, brick pilasters flanking the entrance, engaged Doric wood columns on the porches and Palladian windows.

Subsequent to Hopkins' design for ELAWA FARM, David Adler's office worked on the farm complex. Extant drawings indicate that Robert Work, who was with Adler and signed his drawings after Henry Dangler died in 1917, drew up plans for the Superintendent's cottage located in the southwest corner of the farm group in 1919-20. It was built in the Georgian Colonial Revival style to complement the farm group. The earliest permits on record at Lake Forest's building department date back only to 1937, but Permit #1840, dated June 25, 1937, indicates Adler was hired to enclose a porch at 990, the address for the farm buildings. Barry Carroll recalls that Adler designed the brick chicken coop located west of Hopkins' farm group at the north end of the property, and there is a drawing of this building signed by Robert Work in the collection of the Architecture Department of the Art Institute. There is a drawing for a building marked "NW Machine Shed" dated 9/15/28 and designed by R. C. Clark in the collection of Lake Forest Open Lands. No information on the importance of R. C. Clark is presently available. Permit #3629 indicates that a "brooder house" was built for Armour at 990 in 1951.

THE GENTLEMAN FARM

Farm estates were known as "gentleman farms" or "hobby farms" because, even if some money was made, the farm operation rarely if ever supported the house. Country place owners built farms to enjoy the pleasures of land ownership and to engage in active outdoor pursuits, not to create a major source of income. And gentleman farms appealed to the weary city dweller. The cities that industrialization had brought into being, like Chicago, were perceived as crowded, dirty, disease ridden and corrupt. The farm group expressed a profound romantic nostalgia for the country's agrarian past, a past that writers like John Burroughs praised as a sweeter time. In addition, gentleman farms provided a wholesome environment for children and fun for the family. There were horseback rides, and wonderful opportunities for guest outings. Clive Aslet, who wrote *The American Country House*, in 1990, devoted an entire chapter to "The Farm Beautiful", calling it "more fun than a yacht". The Armour's 1939 movie shows their family having a wonderful time at the farm, on sleigh rides and skeet shooting. The symbolic importance of the farm was often so great to the country house owner that he kept the word "farm" in the name of the estate even if there was no working farm.

The significance of ELAWA FARM is unquestionable. The farm complex is architecturally important as a distinguished example of "farm group" architecture, designed by Alfred Hopkins, the architect who literally wrote the book on elegant estate farms. ELAWA FARM reflects his theories on fanning as well as his artistic approach to farm design. The complex is a beautifully designed Georgian Colonial Revival complex, equal in design quality to many Lake Forest residences by other well-known architects.

The farm buildings and the gate houses which form the main residence are also important for their connection with David Adler, whose significance as an estate designer has received world wide acclaim. Adler designed the main residence (the gate houses and garage complex), the superintendent's residence, alterations to the house, farm buildings and the chicken coop.

What is particularly remarkable about ELAWA FARM is its rarity and its level of integrity. There are few farm groups to be found in eastern Lake County and only one, Crab Tree Farm, that is arguably as significant. "Arcady Farm", built in Lake Forest by Arthur Heun for Arthur Meeker, would have been comparable in significance if it had not been demolished. Although there are many farm groups on the east coast, ELAWA FARM is basically all that remains in Lake Forest of farm group architecture. ELAWA FARM is also extraordinary for its integrity. The buildings are virtually unaltered. The footprint of the Hopkins-designed complex, as well as the detailing, is intact. The only changes to the farm group were made by David Adler and these are historic, (over fifty years old), having gained significance over time.