

Connecticut Village

Some readers may recall Mark Twain’s story, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, but most of us probably don’t realize that we have our own Yankee neighborhood right here in Wilmette.

Our little piece of New England is called Connecticut Village, an area of about eight acres along Richmond and Ashland, south of the Kenilworth train station on the east side of the Metra tracks. The Gage family had owned the land since 1894, and like another Gage property—No Man’s Land—it long remained unincorporated. In 1938, an energetic young developer named Irvin A. Blietz announced his intention of building a distinctive “Colonial” community there that would incorporate as a separate, self-governing village. Potential purchasers would be required to prove to a committee organized by Blietz that they were “substantial citizens” who would provide the desired “social atmosphere.”

Wilmette foiled that part of the plan by annexing the area in 1939, but Blietz forged ahead with the new subdivision, quickly building the first of over 40 homes whose appearance bore little relation to their Midwestern surroundings. “Connecticut Village,” his

full-page ad rhapsodized, “is all its name implies - winding lanes, lamp lighter lamp posts, beautiful gardens, evergreens and lawns and all of the homes are in Colonial styles... The very atmosphere spells beauty, friendliness and contentness.” To help achieve the quaint look of colonial New England, all electric and phone lines were buried underground, an innovation at the time.



Connecticut Village would prove to be only one phase of a career that would span more than three decades, during which Blietz became one of the most influential builders on the North Shore. In Wilmette in the 1950s, he built two sets of townhouse apartments in the Linden Square neighborhood, both of them in his beloved “Colonial” style, as well as Sprucewood Village at Hibbard and Illinois, whose ranch-style homes boasted such novel features as picture windows, indoor “plant-o-rama” planters, and Florida-inspired “Tropicana” rooms. Other Blietz developments included the New England and Williamsburg Villages in Skokie, Pine Tree Village in Winnetka, and Elm Tree Village in Evanston. More, perhaps, than to anyone else, the North Shore owes its echoes of old New England to the imagination and drive of Irvin A. Blietz.

Rachel Kuhn



This home was built in 1940 for Judge Orr, Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court from 1930 to 1939.



Looking west down Ashland toward Richmond (Photo by Vicki Bihrenberg)