

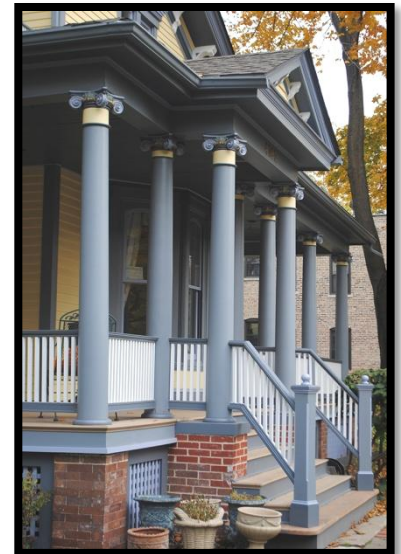
JOHN GRAY FARMHOUSE
4362 WEST GRACE STREET
BUILT 1856
ITALIANATE STYLE

The John Gray Farmhouse is an impressive Italianate-style structure situated on a generous lot at the northeast corner of West Grace Street and North Kostner Avenue. Built in 1856, the house is the oldest extant residence in Irving Park. The house was included in both the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (rated orange) and the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (rated P); it is architecturally

important as a finely-crafted and well-preserved example of the Italianate style, and is historically important for its associations with John Gray, the founder of Grayland and one-time Sheriff of Cook County.

The Gray Farmhouse is among the finest examples of Italianate architecture in Irving Park. Popular in Chicago and throughout the Midwest from about 1850 to 1880, the style was loosely based on the Italian country villa and grew as a reaction against the formal classical ideals that had dominated American architecture for 150 years. The Gray Farmhouse is an example of a sub-type of the Italianate Style called the Italian Villa. Italian Villas are generally larger than other Italianate residences of the period, and feature a more complex massing and wraparound porches. The defining feature of this sub-type is a square tower. The Gray Farmhouse is a quintessential Italian Villa, with a square tower rising from the intersection of front (south) and west side gable bays. The tower also contains the main entry to the house, which is tucked beneath the generous wraparound porch.

The exterior of the house is peppered with the classically-inspired decorative elements that are the hallmark of Italianate architecture. The overhanging eaves and rake under the main roofline and the roof on the tower are lined with carved wood brackets. The wraparound porch is supported by round columns topped with delicately scrolled Ionic capitals. A triangular pediment marks the porch entrance. Round arch windows punctuate the tower walls, and segmental arch windows are located within the east side polygonal window bay. Both the interior and exterior of the house were restored in the late 1980s and early 1990s by owners Greg and Pam Thoma, who also built the second story addition to the rear of the house.



**Ionic columns supporting
wraparound porch**

John Gray's figure looms large in the history of Irving Park. Born in New York State in 1810, Gray spent his early years on his family's farm. He married Phoebe M. Allen in 1834, and the couple and their two young daughters moved to Chicago in 1837. Gray entered into the hotel business, buying the Green Tree Tavern at Lake and Canal Streets and transforming it into the Chicago Hotel, known as one of the best hotels in the city. In 1840, John Gray purchased 160 acres of farmland approximately six miles northwest of the city. Seven years later, he purchased an adjoining 160-acre parcel encompassing the northwest corner of Section 22, which would later become the

Grayland subdivision. Gray purchased the land intending to establish a farm, but was delayed in doing so by a business venture—in 1850, he moved his family to remote Niles Township, where he opened a saw mill with



Robert Heartt. Gray remained in Niles until 1855, when he again set his sights on the farmland in Jefferson Township. He built the frame Italianate farmhouse at what is now 4362 West Grace Street in 1856, and settled into his new life there. He donated an acre of his holdings in 1857 for the Jefferson Town Hall, and became deeply involved in social and political life in the township. He served multiple terms as town hall trustee, and was elected as overseer of highways in 1857, 1858, and 1867. In 1857, Gray's political career expanded beyond the township when he was elected as the first Republican Sheriff of Cook County.

John Gray's most lasting contribution to Irving Park was the development of Grayland, a suburban subdivision created in 1873 from a portion of his farm holdings in Jefferson Township. Grayland was the second major suburban development in Jefferson Township, platted just four years after the Irving Park Subdivision to the north and east. In fact, Gray had sold 80 acres of his farmland to Charles T. Race and his

partners for the development of Irving Park in 1869. Gray's initial motivation for creating Grayland was to provide for his six children and their families, but he quickly realized the vast financial opportunity of developing the land. The Chicago Fire of 1871 had created a pressing demand for new housing, and many residents were eager to take the opportunity to escape from the crowded confines of the city. The new subdivision was ideally situated to take advantage of this new demand, with the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad's Grayland station, and the Milwaukee Plank Road (now Milwaukee Avenue) providing easy access to the city. Gray eventually abandoned

Square corner tower

farming to focus exclusively on building up Grayland, investing more than \$30,000 of his own money improving the land.

Gray's investment paid off, and in 1874 he built an imposing brick mansion for his family at the corner of Milwaukee and Lowell Avenues. His daughter Jane E. Howland and her husband continued to occupy the farmhouse on Grace Street, and acquired formal ownership of the property after her mother's death 1888, and just one year before John Gray's death. The house passed out of the ownership of the Gray family in 1902, when it was purchased by the Hummel Family. The Hummels sold off the east end of the property in 1920, but the farmhouse remained in the family until the death of Lillian Hummel in 1971. Ron and Robin Swchwatz are the current owners.

