

VILLA SANTA MARIA
6101 Oak Forest Avenue
Tinley Park
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1279

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Midwest Regional Office
601 Riverfront Drive
Omaha, Nebraska 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VILLA SANTA MARIA

HABS NO. IL-1279

- Location:** 6101 Oak Forest Avenue, Tinley Park, Cook County, Illinois
- Latitude: 41.583733, Longitude: -87.761521. Coordinates taken from location of residence. Obtained October 12, 2021 utilizing Google Earth (WGS8) with accuracy at an estimated +/-3 meters. There is no restriction on the release of the location to the public.
- Present Owner/Occupant:** Forest Preserves of Cook County
- Present Use:** Unoccupied
- Significance:** Villa Santa Maria is an early example of a Ranch home in a suburban town. Interior finishes are modern and unique to their time.
- The original owner of the building, William A. Wilkin, was an influential member of St. George Parish in Tinley Park. He later sold the property to the Mantellate Sisters, a Catholic order that was active in and around Chicago, including teaching at the St. George Parish School.
- Historians:** Katherine Pohl and Kesha Patel, Fall 2021
- Project Information:** This documentation was prepared pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and 3 CFR Part 800 to address Stipulation 1. MITIGATION of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for Demolition of a Residence (Villa Santa Maria) at 6101 Oak Forest Avenue, Tinley Park, Illinois.
- The Forest Preserve District of Cook Country plans to convert the property to public space.
- The Villa Santa Maria recording project was executed between Spring 2020 and Fall 2021 by AltusWorks, Inc., and Dirk Matthews Photography in cooperation with Forest Preserves of Cook County. Key personnel included Katherine Pohl, project manager and historian, Kesha Patel, historian, Anney Grish, quality control, and Dirk Matthews, photographer.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: c.1941-1955
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners, uses: William A Wilkin built the residence for his family. It became known as Villa Santa Maria after the Mantellate Sisters purchased the property from Wilkin in 1955. Sisters from the order lived in the residence until 2018.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: Unavailable
6. Alterations and additions: No additions have been made to the residence and very few alterations or updates have been made.

B. Historic Context

Villa Santa Maria is located in Tinley Park, Illinois, a suburban town south of Chicago. The first known European settler arrived in the 1830s, and larger numbers began arriving in the 1840s. Due to many German and Dutch immigrants, the township became known as Bremen, after the German port city.¹ A large grove, named Cooper's Grove after an early settler, was a prominent local landmark in the county. In the 1830s, a large cabin was built near this grove as a stopping point for cattle drivers and other travelers making their way to Chicago. In 1852, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad laid railroad tracks through the township, cutting a path through the northern edge of Cooper's Grove. In 1892, the village to the southwest of the grove incorporated under the name Tinley Park.² As the village grew, employment in the area shifted from agriculture to industry. After World War II, the population of the village quickly increased due to the availability of affordable housing.

The parcel that Villa Santa Maria now occupies had several previous owners before the residence was built. Earliest records from 1839 indicate that William Blackstone and Robert Clark bought the land from the Public Domain.³ Cook County deed records show the parcel changing hands multiple times over the next century. Oak Forest Avenue first appeared on a map in 1900. Two structures were also shown on the map in that year, however, they later

¹ Goodspeed Historical Association, "Country Towns," in *History of Cook County*, 336.

² "Tinley Park, IL," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*.

³ Paula Bryant, and Paula Porubcan Branstner. "ISAS Log No, 18039." 2.

disappear from the record.⁴ William Wilkin acquired the property in 1938.⁵ He then built a residence and caretaker's house on the edge of Cooper's Grove, which appears on maps in 1955.

Wilkin, with his wife, Margaret, and their family, built a home on the property and lived there for a more than a decade. He also owned other properties in the vicinity, including apartments and undeveloped plots.⁶ In 1949 he donated four acres of this land to St. George Parish, a Catholic church in Tinley Park, for the building of their new school.⁷ Later, in 1952, Wilkin offered land in the same block to the parish so that the road there could be closed to make the area safer for children.⁸ The Wilkins were lifelong members of the parish. After the death of Margaret in 1953 and the marriage of his youngest son the following year, Wilkin decided to move out of the home.⁹

The Mantellate Sisters, a community of Catholic nuns, purchased the estate from William A. Wilkin in 1955.¹⁰ The order, which began in Italy, had been working in Chicago in the early twentieth century. They lived on the Near North Side of Chicago, serving the mostly Italian parish of St. Philip Benizi, until 1956 when the city decided to raze the building as part of an urban renewal program. Part of the Mantellate Sisters' work included caring for orphaned children.¹¹ To provide a healthy environment for the children the order purchased property in Blue Island, Illinois, which eventually became the Mother of Sorrows Institute. Despite the order already having convents in Chicago and in Blue Island the Mantellate Sisters wanted more space for the novitiate. They acquired the Villa Santa Maria property for this purpose. While residing there the Mantellates supported the community through programming on their own property as well as through St. George Parish. At first, the main residence and a caretaker cottage were the only structures on the property.¹² Later the Mantelle Sisters built a new preschool and kindergarten on the property. The same building was also used to host women who came to retreat and reflect. The Mantellates taught at St. George School and performed ministry to support the growing village of Tinley Park. Sisters remained on the property until 2018.¹³ The remaining members then moved to the Motherhouse in Plainfield, Illinois.¹⁴

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

⁴ Paula Bryant, and Paula Porubcan Branstner. "ISAS Log No, 18039." 2.

⁵ Cook County Recorder of Deeds.

⁶ "To Rent Apts Suburban," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 20, 1946.

⁷ "A School Rises in Tinley Park Parish Project," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Apr. 3, 1949.

⁸ "75 Attend Tinley Park Village Board Meeting," *The Star* (Tinley Park, IL), Aug. 12, 1952.

⁹ "Mrs. M. Wilkin Passes Away," *The Star* (Tinley Park, IL), Nov. 26, 1953; "Josetta Pentecost, Tinley Park Man Are Married," *The Chicago Heights Star*, Aug. 31, 1954.

¹⁰ "Sisters, Servants of Mary (Mantellate Sisters) in *Archdiocese of Chicago Institutional History*, 1154.

¹¹ *Ibid* 1153.

¹² *Ibid* 1154.

¹³ Donna Vickroy. "After 70 Years, the Mantellate Sisters Leave St. George." *Daily Southtown* (Chicago, IL), Jun. 4, 2018.

¹⁴ "Sisters, Servants of Mary (Mantellate Sisters) in *Archdiocese of Chicago Institutional History*, 1154.

A. General statement

1. Architectural character: The residence Villa Santa Maria is an early example of a Ranch style home in a suburban town. The limestone façade and clay tile roof suggest traditional architectural ideals; however, the details of the residence show its modernity. The sprawling plan, asymmetrical façade, and window types all became typical features of Ranch style homes. On the interior, unique, modern finishes are common throughout the main level.
2. Condition of fabric: The original fabric of the building, both exterior and interior, has had few modifications or alterations.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall Dimensions: 75'-8" x 36'-7"
2. Foundations: Brick and concrete masonry units
3. Walls: Ashlar pattern cut limestone. The hue ranges from white to light yellow.
4. Structural system: Wood stud construction over foundation bearing walls.
5. Porch: The front porch is bracketed by a cheek wall on each side, also acting as a guard. Each wall is topped with a limestone cap. Concrete steps are centered on the porch and extend in a semicircular pattern.
6. Chimneys: Only one chimney is visible on the roof. It is clad in the same ashlar pattern limestone as the building and has two flues.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors:
 - i. The main entry door is wood with three individual glass lights. A decorative copper handle and matching lock adorn the door. The back door has a hollow metal replacement door. The west entry has an exterior hollow metal replacement door with a small glass light. At the same opening is an original interior wood storm door with a large screen.
 - ii. Two garage door openings face the driveway on the east side of the house. One door opening appears to be original. The other opening

has been filled in with a man door, concrete masonry units, and glass block unit.

- b. Windows and shutters: Most windows are original wood windows. The predominant style is double-hung. Both front and back façades have one picture window. Double-hung and picture windows have frames for storm windows. The windows in the sunroom, above the garage, are divided into six lights each with symmetry around the vertical center of the windows. These windows do not have storm frames. The top sashes operate as a double-hung and the bottom as an awning. Windowsills are made of cast stone. Basement windows are made from glass block units.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Low sloped roof with clay tile roofing.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Overhanging eaves with wood fascia and copper gutters

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: All main functions are on the main floor. The shared living spaces, living room, dining room, sunroom, and kitchen, are clustered near the front door. A hallway leads to bedrooms and bathrooms. A basement level extends under the whole of the first level, mostly devoted to utility spaces and a garage.
2. Flooring: Wood flooring is the most common finish in the house. Although some rooms are now covered in carpeting, the original wood floor can be found underneath. The tile floors in the bathrooms on the main level are original. Each bathroom has a different color scheme with a different tile pattern.
3. Wall and ceiling finish:
 - a. Most living spaces are covered with plaster. An exception to this is the sunroom, which has the same stone as seen on the exterior.
 - b. Bathrooms have typical 4" x 4" ceramic tiles, each with a different tile color theme. In the main floor bathrooms, pink or yellow tile extends from the floor to the top of the door frame. If a window extends above this height, the tile also jogs around the window frame and into the window jambs. The top tile in both bathrooms is a black trim piece. There is simpler green tile wainscoting in the basement bathroom.
 - c. Aluminum kitchen tiles cover the walls, ceiling, and soffit of the kitchen. The tile is oriented vertically and joints are minimal.

4. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorways have a unique frame detail which is recessed in the wall. The frame creates a slim profile around the door, without any external trim. The plaster finish curves down to meet the frame. Doors themselves are flush wood.
5. Decorative features and trim:
 - a. A marble fireplace acts as the centerpiece of the living room. The base, top, and interior surround are made of green marble with white veining. A carved white marble piece sits in front.
6. Mechanical Equipment: Furnace with forced air system.

D. Site

1. Historic landscape design: The entrance to the site from Oak Forest Avenue is marked with low sweeping stone entry walls. The grey limestone walls flank the driveway and support a gate. A small brick pedestal, formerly used to support a sign when the site was used as a convent, sits in front of the building.
2. Outbuildings: Several outbuildings stand on the site to the west of the main residence. The first built was a small cottage for a caretaker. Later, two classroom buildings were constructed. Most recently, a garage and picnic shelter were built to the east of the classrooms. These buildings are clustered near a separate driveway located to the west of the driveway for the main residence. South of the main residence are two storage buildings. On the far west corner of the property is a cell tower surrounded by a fence.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Sister Maria Musto, Mantellate Sister and former resident of Villa Santa Maria, phone conversation with author, September 25, 2021.

B. Selected Sources:

"A School Rises in Tinley Park Parish Project." *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. Aug. 21, 1952.

Bryant, Paula, and Paula Porubcan Branstner. "ISAS Log No, 18039." Archaeological Survey Short Report, Champaign, IL: Illinois State Archaeological Survey, 2018.

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<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1255.html>.
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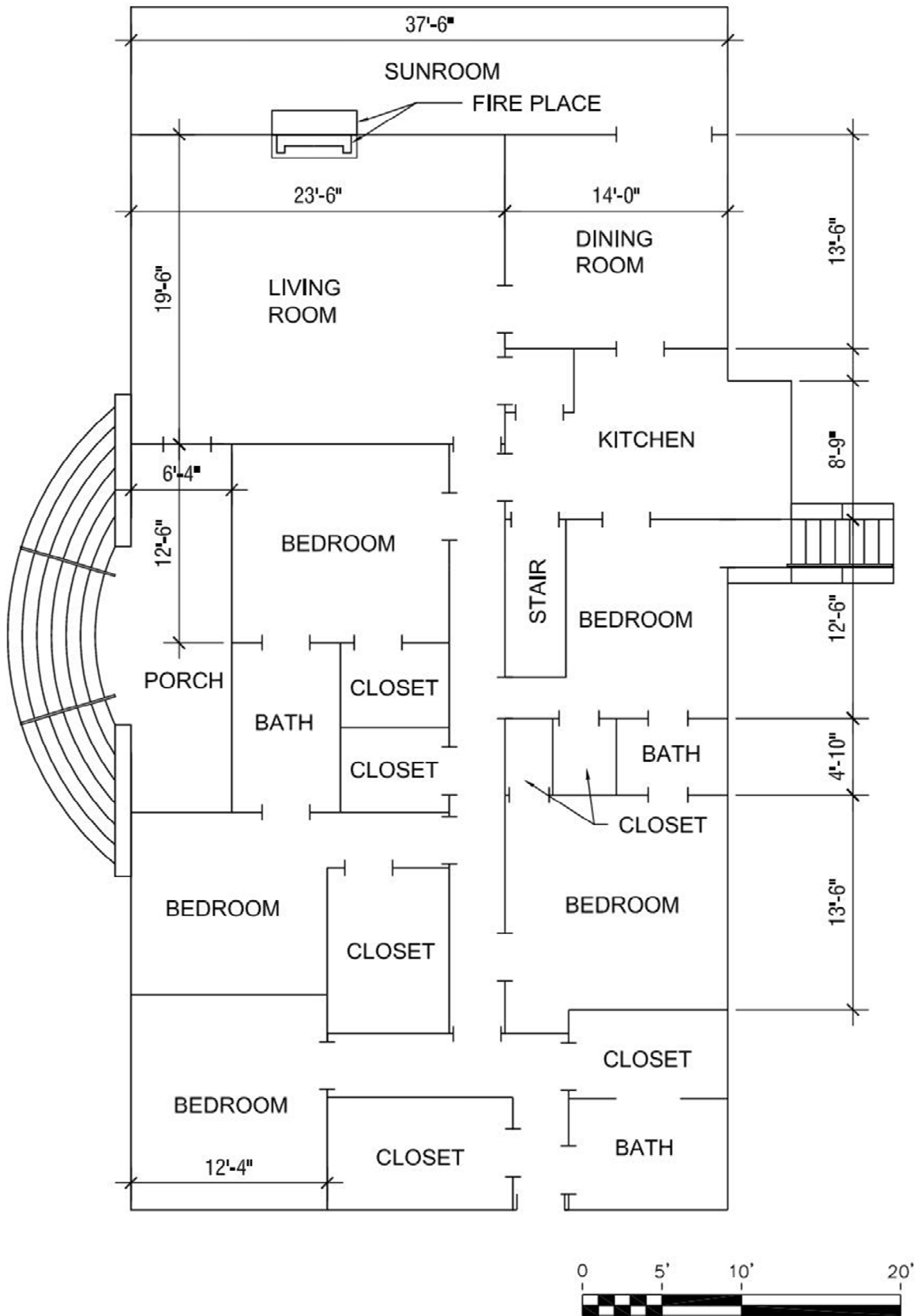


Figure 1. Floor plan of main floor at Villa Santa Maria

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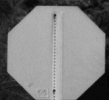
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Dirk Matthews, Photographer, 2020

- IL-1279-1 View from Oak Forest Avenue looking towards Villa Santa Maria entry gate.
- IL-1279-2 View of Villa Santa Maria from driveway.
- IL-1279-3 Looking west from sidewalk towards View of Villa Santa Maria. North and east façades visible.
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- IL-1276-12 Interior view of bedroom adjacent to kitchen at Villa Santa Maria. Typical trim and window are visible. Open door shows glimpses of the kitchen and bathroom.
- IL-1276-13 Interior view of bedroom at Villa Santa Maria. Typical trim is visible. Open door shows view through bathroom to adjoining bedroom.

HABS 11-1279-01



HABS 1L-1279-02



HABS IL-1279-03



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