

Orton Park Historic District

The block that now consists of Orton Park was established as Madison's first official burying ground. In 1846, just after Madison became a Village, trustees purchased the block to serve as the public cemetery. The City was growing slowly at the time and the 256 plots were expected to meet the Village's needs for the foreseeable future. Madison's population, however, began to boom around 1850. In the face of this influx of residents, plus a series of cholera epidemics, officials decided to purchase a much larger tract of land west of the Village and move the graves from the smaller cemetery to the new larger one. The original cemetery tract was converted to a City park, which opened in 1887 and became an attractive place for residential houses.

Although a few houses were built near the cemetery in the pioneer era, the most intensive development occurred in one of Madison's boom periods, from the 1890s to the Depression. By the early 1930s all of the lots surrounding the park were filled. The Orton Park Historic District includes the park itself, the houses that face the park on all four sides, and some adjoining groupings of houses on Spaight and Rutledge Streets. Since most of the houses were built between 1890 and 1920, early twentieth century styles predominate. About one-third of the houses in the district are Queen Anne. Another third are progressive Craftsman and Prairie style designs. The park still serves as an attractive urban green space, and the focal point of the neighborhood.