

## Herman H. Lackner (1912-1998)

---



Dates of Interview:

July 30, 1983

**Location of Interview:**

Lackner's home in Winnetka, Illinois

**Interviewer:**

Betty J. Blum

**Length of Transcript:**

44 pages

[View Online](#)

### Biographical Summary

Herman H. Lackner was born in 1912 in Evanston, Illinois. He attended Harvard College from 1930-32 and Armour Institute of Technology (now Illinois Institute of Technology) from 1934-36. While still a student, he worked as an office boy in the office of Chester H. Wolcott, and from 1933-40 as a draftsman for General Homes, one of the first architectural firms that designed prefabricated housing. Lackner worked for Holabird & Root for two years before opening his own office in Winnetka, Illinois, in 1945. He was known for his sensitive additions to older residences, many of which are on Chicago's North Shore, and for his collaborations with landscape architect Gertrude Kuh. Lackner died in Evanston in 1998.

### Interview Highlights

Lackner speaks about his intention to be an architect; working for Howard Fisher and General Homes; obtaining a license; personalities and a job at Holabird & Root; several colleagues; Chicago's Century of Progress International Exhibition, 1933-1934; what was too new and too old.



Michels House; Winnetka, Illinois, 1954-1955.

Photograph courtesy Herman Lackner Archive, Winnetka Historical Society.



Herman Lackner House; Winnetka, Illinois, 1980.  
 Photograph courtesy Herman Lackner Archive, Winnetka Historical Society.

### Interview Excerpt

"A few years ago I got a job to design the new building for Chapin Hall, which is a home for disturbed children in Chicago--a very interesting place. I had been doing things there for a long time, and they wanted a new building, so the head of the women's board came to me with a little list. 'This is what we want: accommodations for thirty children and six houseparents, playrooms and studyrooms,' and blah-blah-blah. It was a short list on half a piece of paper, and so then I called the head or the director or whatever they call him, whom I knew well, and I said, 'George, what more do you want than this?' 'That's it.' So I went down there and lived for three days in the boy's cottage. It was an experience that, even if I weren't designing a building, would have been fun. But really, they were comical little kids and awfully nice. I happened to know the previous architect, and he said, 'Have you time for that? Have you time to design those buildings?' He couldn't imagine. Everyone does it their own way, but I think sometimes in the present day and age people rely too much on elaborate studies and statistics and getting it all in the abstract." (p. 22)



Ridge Farm Building, Chapin Hall, Chicago, 1965-66. Photograph courtesy of Katharine Cousins.

### Additional Resources

[Related archival materials in the R&B Archives](#)

Funding for this oral history was provided by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. Publication of this oral history in web-accessible form was made possible by the generous support of The Vernon and Marcia Wagner Access Fund at The Art Institute of Chicago, The James & Catherine Haveman Foundation, The Reva and David Logan Family Fund of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, and Daniel Logan and The Reva and David Logan Foundation.