

Way We Were

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The Neils of Norfolk Avenue

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920 Norfolk is an example of T/L-cottage style of architecture. The style was popular in the 1890s, as Park City found its feet as a mountain mining town. The name comes from the cross-wing built perpendicular to the front-facing main section of the house. Because cross-wings were relatively easy to add on to smaller hall-parlor homes, this form of architecture also represented one of the most common ways of expanding existing miner's houses all over town.<sup>1</sup>

Originally built in 1892, William J Neil and his mother Ellen Neil bought 920 Norfolk in 1927. Until then, the Neil family had been living just across the street at 915 Norfolk.<sup>2</sup>

Life had been busy for the family after their move to Park City in 1910. Patriarch James Neil was a miner and prospector, often traveling across Utah in search of new strikes. His wife, Ellen, was proprietor of the St. Louis Bakery on Main Street. The couple had ten children.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I and Summit County saw hundreds of its young men called up for military service. Three of the older Neil sons helped their mother at the bakery but "all three of them were caught in the draft," the *Park Record* reported. Norman, Victor, and William served overseas, all three in France.<sup>3</sup>

James Neil died in July 1924.<sup>4</sup> Oscar, another son, had died just months earlier. At twenty-five, Oscar and his young family had moved to Castle Gate for what was meant to be a short stint in the coal mines. On the morning of March 8, three separate explosions killed all 171 miners at work. The disaster remains the second worst in Utah and tenth worst in the US.<sup>5</sup> Two years later in 1926, the family lost another member, Claude, who died of pneumonia at age twenty-nine.

By 1927, all of the surviving children save William were married and living with their own families. Ellen and William purchased the house at 920 Norfolk and moved in. Ellen, retired from the bakery business, was active in the LDS Church, the local Women of Woodcraft lodge, and "honorary grandmother" to the Park City Boy Scouts. Both mother and son were instrumental in establishing the local American Legion. William was charter member of the Legion. Ellen helped found the Women's Auxiliary to the Legion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Ewanowski, Historic Site Inventory, 2015

<sup>2</sup> 1920 US Census

<sup>3</sup> *Park Record*, July 27, 1917

<sup>4</sup> *Park Record*, July 4, 1924

<sup>5</sup> *Park Record*, March 14, 1924

<sup>6</sup> *Park Record*, December 5 and 12, 1946

When she died at the age of eighty, Ellen left behind a thirty-five year legacy in Park City, forty-four grandchildren, and thirty-nine great-grandchildren. William Neil continued to own the home until shortly before his death, also at age eighty, in 1969.<sup>7</sup>

Come see both 915 and 920 Norfolk Avenue on our annual Historic Home Tour. Join us June 24 from 10am to 3pm to hear more about the architecture and history of the homes on lower Norfolk and Woodside avenues. Tickets are \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members. For information call the Park City Museum at 435-649-7457 or visit our website at [parkcityhistory.org](http://parkcityhistory.org).



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Tax Photo Collection

Caption: The different sizes of the cross-wing and front-facing sections of the house might indicate that they were built separately. Even so, both were constructed in the 1890s as the house appears on 1900 maps with both sections.

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<sup>7</sup> *Park Record*, September 5, 1969