



# Northwest Chicago Historical Society

*Your Neighborhood Historical Society*

Newsletter January 2017

Number XXV

## **A Gorgeous Garden of Dreams: The Gateway Theater Logan Square**

This past year, the Northwest Chicago Historical Society was proud that Jefferson Park and Portage Park were chosen to showcase venues in Open House Chicago, an annual architectural festival organized by the Chicago Architecture Foundation. Multiple establishments on the Northwest side opened their door for the very first time to host curious guests from all over the country. The venues included the Copernicus Center, Carl Schurz High School, the Jefferson Masonic Temple, the Rivoli Theater, Our Lady of Victory, Portage Arts Lofts, and the Portage Theater. Over 100,000 people participated this year, making it one of the largest events of its kind in the world. We hope that we are able to continue to bring more people into the area to visit our historical and cultural heritage.

In our most recent newsletter issues, members were most excited about the movie theater pictures, so this issue continues on that theme. This time, we feature the Kobelinski Theater, a theater inside the Copernicus Center that has been redeveloped into a cultural venue and multi-event complex. At one time, this was called the Gateway Theater, and it was the largest movie palaces on the Northwest Side. Since the Copernicus Center purchased the Gateway, they transformed the lobby and outside marquee to be more reflective of its current usage. However, the community is fortunate that they saved the theater from the wrecking ball and have beautifully preserved the historic, decorative interior. While the venue now is mostly used for live performances, the center also hosts many multi-cultural and neighborhood events. This is one of the area's most successful examples of adaptive reuse.

Some NWCHS members have partnered with Forgotten Chicago, Preservation Chicago, and Logan Square Preservation to co-author a book on Logan Square. This book, published by Arcadia Publishing, will be available for purchase later this year. Members can read about the upcoming book in this edition, as we look forward to its publication.

We look forward to seeing you in 2017! - *Frank Suerth*

### Mission Statement:

As the Northwest Chicago Historical Society, our mission is to educate others about the history of the Northwest neighborhoods of Chicago. We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications. Additionally, we desire to collaborate with others in the community to continue to maintain and preserve the history of our collective neighborhoods. By linking the past with the present and the future, we will provide awareness and create appreciation for our place in Chicago's and Illinois' history.

## The Northwest Chicago Historical Society

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### NW Chicago Historical Society

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### Membership:

\$15.00 per calendar year  
\$10.00 for 65 years old and over

Website: [nwchicagohistory.com](http://nwchicagohistory.com)

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# Letters

*Letters may have been edited for clarity and space*

I am an antique dealer and I ran across 2 unopened cardboard containers of Antique Ford Auto Top Dressing Kits. The brand is Verigood and it was made by Auto Products Chemical Co. of Chicago. I have searched US Patents and Google and I can't find out anything about this company. Can you tell me anything about the company, when they were in business, where they were located, maybe the owners name, anything you have would help me out. Thanks in advance.

Jeff Rorie - Mishawaka, IN

*We do not have any information on this company. You may want to try The Newberry Library in Chicago. - NWCHS*

I'm looking for some info on an old commercial building on Elston, between Leland and Lowell, that is now a fitness center and was part of the old Banker's Life complex. Main address is 4677 N. Elston.

Maleah - Mayfair

*4677-80 N. Elston - Progress Laundry & Cleaners operated from this location from about 1928 to the mid-60's. See their ad on the right. - NWCHS*

I recently read your July 2016 Newsletter I was very impressed with the quality and content. I would very much like to become a member. I have resided here since 1976. I retired in 2006 after 30 years as railroad civil engineer for the Chicago and Northwestern RR and Metra. I have a deep interest in railroads and railroad history. If I can be of any help along these lines please call me.

Thank You

Gerald B. Pitzen - Old Irving

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# Letters

Thank you for all of the wonderful memories. I look forward to these issues. I grew up on the 5900 block of Gunnison Street from 1940 to 1954. What wonderful memories there. There was a hot house & florist across the street. Any photos of that block?

Thanks again,

Carol Nordstrom Barshop - Elk Grove Village, IL

*We do not have any photos from that location on Gunnison but maybe one of our readers do.*  
- NWCHS

I'm a producer for WBEZ's "Curious City" podcast. Right now I'm working on a story about how to track down lost Chicago recipes. We're focusing specifically on the fried chicken dish from Mandis Chicken King that used to operate at Montrose and Central in Portage Park until it closed in the 70s.

I was wondering if NCHS had any old photos of the restaurant in your archives, or knew older residents in the area who might have some in their personal albums. We'd love to feature it in our web story.

Let me know what you think, and thanks in advance for your help!

Best,

Katherine Nagasawa

*We did not have any photos but do have a copy of one of the restaurant's ads. The address 4353 N. Central is now a Walgreen's Drug Store.* - NWCHS

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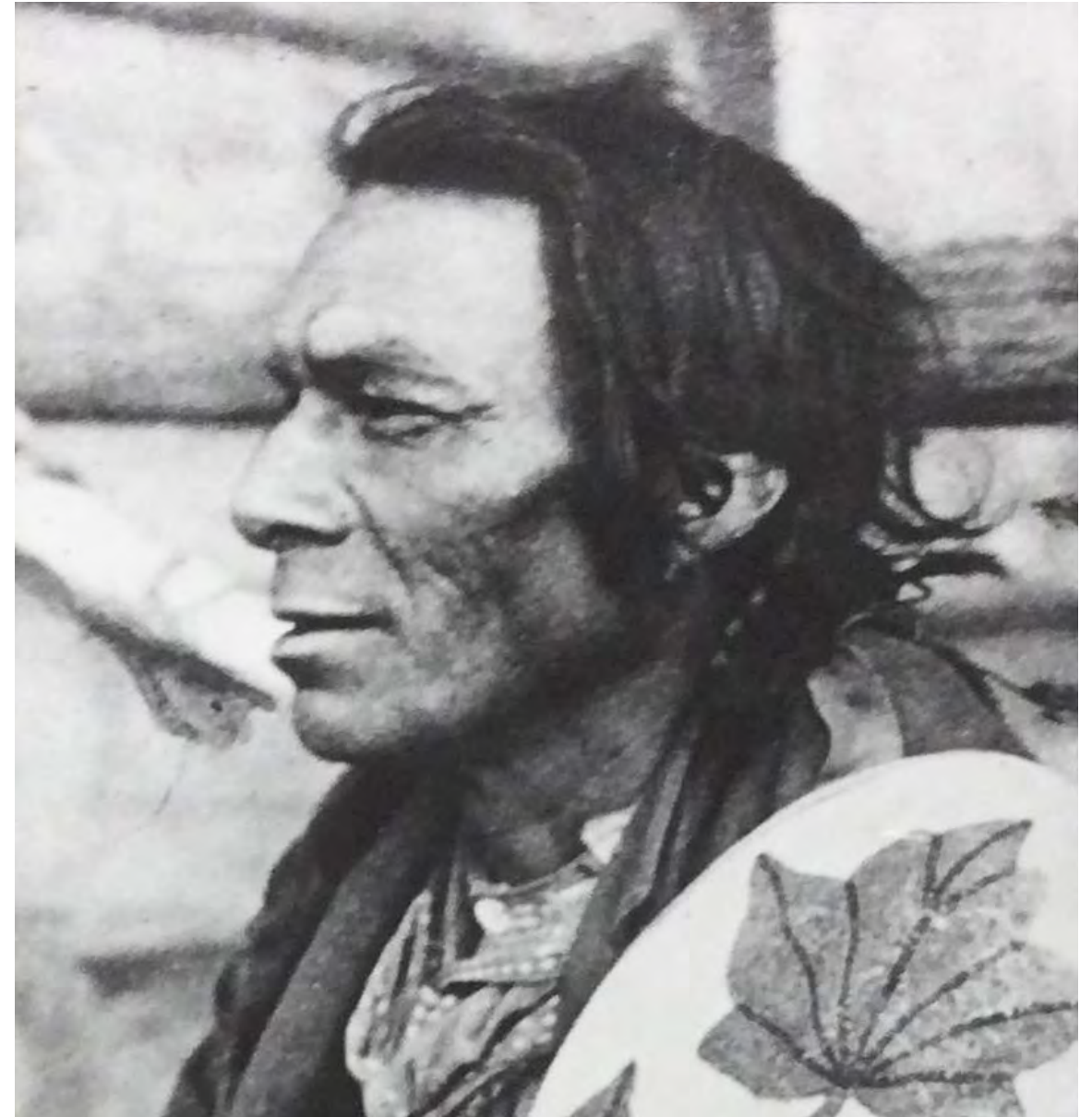
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## Billy Caldwell?



This newly found photo was labeled Billy Caldwell (Sauganash). While there are no known pictures of Billy Caldwell and we do not know what he may have look like, but most likely this is not picture of him. Billy Caldwell died on September 28, 1841 and if this photo was of him, it had to be taken before his death, which a photo of this quality would be impossible to achieve in this time of early photography.

## A Gorgeous Garden of Dreams: The Gateway Theater

By Susanna Ernst

On the Northwest side, most people are familiar with the Copernicus Center, Chicago's Polish cultural center. Not only is it a hub of Polish activity, but it is a venue for parties, festivals, and concerts for all people in the area. The "Solidarity Tower" atop the entrance is one of the tallest and most recognizable structures in the community today. However, many people may not know that this building was once the home of the Gateway Theater, the main second run movie theater on the Northwest Side. Inside the building, the theater itself sits perfectly intact and is a monument to Chicago theater history.

The Gateway Theater, designed by the prestigious firm of Rapp and Rapp, opened on June 27th, 1930. It is the only surviving operational movie theater in the Jefferson Park area, thanks to the preservation efforts of the Copernicus Foundation.

In the week prior to opening in June of 1930, the community celebrated the upcoming event with numerous festivities, capped off by a major parade sponsored by area businesses. All the Chicago dailies covered the event, and in fact, the Chicago Herald-Examiner put forth a full page spread proclaiming the new theater as "the most acoustically perfect theatre in the world." The Tribune reported: "A Gorgeous Garden of Dreams comes to life at the Gateway to the Great Northwest." The reports were not guilty of sensationalism, as the architects indeed had given extra special attention to the acoustics and all the artistic elements. Movies with sound were completely new to the entertainment field, and they were to find a perfect environment in this brand new, state-of-the-art theater.

The Gateway was one of the larger neighborhood theatres built for the Balaban & Katz chain in Chicago. Inside the theater are classical Roman-inspired flourishes; complete with a dark blue sky in the ~2000-seat auditorium, and classical statuary and vines on the side walls. It is one of very few surviving 'atmospheric style' theaters in Chicago, and the design was likely a collaborative effort among the architects and designers employed with the firm, as well as Mason Rapp, who was new to the firm and only in his twenties when the project was completed. The Rapp and Rapp firm was famous for designing deluxe theaters not only in Chicago (Chicago, Oriental, and Palace Theatres), but throughout the United States. It is quite rare, as it was one of only a very few 'atmospheric style' theaters designed by the firm.

An **atmospheric theatre** is a type of movie palace that was popular in the 1920s in America. The atmospheric design transported audiences to a European courtyard or garden. A sky replaced the ornate dome of traditional theatre design. Wispy floating clouds produced by a projector replaced crystal chandeliers and gilt. Trees, plants, vines and taxidermy birds replaced gold leaf. Arches, trellises, balconies and plaster statuary replaced marble, painted wood panels, and crystal chandeliers. As the entertainment was about to begin, lighting effects created the illusion of a setting sun, as colors changed from yellow to red. Small lights, arranged in the ceiling in constellation patterns, twinkled to create a sense of infinite space. The atmospheric theatre design made the theatre patron an active, comfortable resident of an imaginary time and place, not a passive, aloof occupant of an oppressive formal space.

**Photo on right was taken on Friday June 27, 1930. The Inaugural Program consisted of the following; Henri A. Keates – At the Mighty Grande Organ, World News Reel in sound, a comedy short "She Who Gets Slapped", an Our Gang comedy short, "The First Seven Years" with the main movie, Zane Grey's "The Light of Western Stars" starring Richard Arlen & Mary Brian. The Gateway did formally open on June 27, 1930 but the night before had a special preview (one performance only) at 9:15 PM.**

*Image courtesy of Theatre Historical Society of America - [historictheatres.org](http://historictheatres.org)*



**“Never place a period  
where God has placed a comma”**

*-Gracie Allen*



**God is still speaking,**



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When Balaban & Katz opened the Gateway in 1930, they dubbed it "A Garden of Dreams." In the atmospheric style, walls and ceiling are drenched in shades of intense blues, and at one time a special projector produced clouds that floated across the ceiling, simulating the outdoor feeling. Architects Rapp & Rapp gave the place a lot of depth. Huge Bernini style columns and partial walls frame the stage, and at the top of these columns sit several mythic and historic busts of Diana, Aphrodite, Apollo and French writer Voltaire. The shelf balcony in the rear runs 10 rows deep, and it renders a view just high enough to offer perhaps the best seats in the house. The acoustics in the building seem crystal clear.

The firm of **Rapp and Rapp** was active in Chicago during the early 20th century. The brothers **Cornelius Ward Rapp** (1861-1926) and **George Leslie Rapp** (1878-1941) of Carbondale, Illinois were the named partners and 1899 alumni of the University of Illinois School of Architecture. Two other brothers, William Mason Rapp and Isaac Rapp were also well-known architects, primarily in Colorado and New Mexico. They designed in the Santa Fe style. Mason Rapp was the son of William Mason Rapp; he moved to Illinois to attend the University of Illinois, where he graduated in 1929. Upon graduation, he moved to Chicago to become part of the Rapp and Rapp firm.

The Gateway Theater was initially planned to be a magnificent movie palace on the Northwest side, commissioned by the theater corporation Lubliner and Trinz (Biograph, Congress, Logan, Davis, etc.) When the stockmarket crashed in October of 1929, many theater corporations struggled, and Lubliner and Trinz was no exception. Since they were having massive financial issues, Balaban and Katz assumed responsibility for the Gateway movie palace. However, due to the current financial climate, they scaled back the original plans for the Gateway, choosing not to pursue the massive opulent movie palace with full stage and dressing rooms. The scaled down version is what exists today.

Balaban and Katz chose to locate theaters—many designed by famous architects Rapp and Rapp—in rapidly growing outlying districts, convenient for the middle class population which provided the bulk of their patrons, as well as downtown Chicago. The company is notable for being the first to offer air conditioning in its theaters. Balaban and Katz operated over a hundred theaters in the Midwest, with more than 50 operated in Chicago alone.

Whenever Balaban and Katz decided that murals would become part of the interior design scheme, they would commission painter and muralist Louis Grell (1887-1960) of Chicago to execute them. Louis Grell also painted murals inside the Chicago Theater, Uptown Theater and many Paramount Theaters across the Midwest and America for Balaban and Katz. The original Grand Hall and Grand Foyer ceilings and walls were hand painted in a maze of connected Greek/Roman scenes of Deities and custom patterns.

When the theater opened in 1930, sound was a recent addition to the movie world. (Prior to 1927, all films were 'silent films.') Because the theater planned only to show films with sound (nicknamed "talkies"), a scheme to include a stage for vaudeville and other live shows was abandoned. Instead, a small sound stage was built to the back of the proscenium to house the screen and the latest speakers. If the "talkies" were just a fad, the sound stage could easily be replaced with a full stage house with the usual complement of dressing rooms, proper rooms, fly space for the scenery and other accoutrements. Soon thereafter, motion picture studios stopped making silent pictures, thus sounding the death knell for vaudeville and stage shows.

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**Photo taken in July 1964. Shown in the parking lot is one of the first produced Ford Mustangs (1964-1/2). The factory building shown on the right is now part of the Copernicus Center.**

*Image courtesy of Theatre Historical Society of America and enhanced by Frank Suerth*

For over 50 years, the Gateway was the direct-from-the-Loop flagship theater for the prolific Balaban and Katz chain. For decades, images of such Hollywood stars as Astaire and Rogers, Hepburn and Tracy, Bogart and Bacall, Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, James Stewart, Cary Grant, John Wayne, and hundreds of others graced the screen of the Gateway. The theatre had perhaps its wildest days in 1973 when 45,000 patrons packed the old place weekly for an extended run of *The Exorcist*. The Gateway Theater had an 'exclusive' agreement that enabled them to show the film; the only place outside the Loop where it was showing as a 'first run.' Former employees spoke of the bedlam during those days: fainting in the lobby was common, thus requiring the Gateway to employ a doctor and nurse on site.

Today, the exterior of the building no longer looks like a movie palace. In 1977, the search began for a permanent site to house a Polish Cultural Center in Chicago. In 1979, groundbreaking ceremonies took place at the Gateway. As it was one of the first movie theaters in Chicago built exclusively for the "talkies," the Foundation decided to preserve the theater itself while remodeling around it, dividing the original 40-foot entry lobby and constructing three floors of office, meeting room and classroom space for the Cultural Center. This first stage was completed in 1981.

In 1985, the 14-story "Solidarity Tower," with its matching facade, was erected atop the building as a symbol of solidarity with the people of Poland. The exterior of the building was modified to resemble the historic Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland.

The tower is an exact replica of the 15th century clock tower adorning the castle, topped with an ornate copper cupola. The money was raised through the generosity of individuals and corporations that recognized the significance to the community of this symbol of the struggle for freedom in an oppressed country.

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The tower and the Palace, which was the residence of Poland's kings and later its presidents, were both leveled by the Nazis during World War II in retribution for the 1944 Warsaw uprising. After the war, both were scrupulously restored by the Polish people with money raised through private contributions.

Since the Copernicus Foundation assumed the building, a thrust stage has been built, and the theater has been utilized for a wide variety of programs, not only Polish in nature, but also Indian, Mexican, Korean, Philippine, and many other interests. Today, the theater is named the Mitchell P Kobelinski Theater, honoring one of the Center's founding fathers who spearheaded the renovation and modernization of the theater. The theater and the entire center provide a cultural hallmark for area. Every year, the center hosts the "Taste of Polonia" festival, the largest Polish festival in the nation. Additionally, here you will find a myriad of film festivals and events that cross cultural and artistic boundaries. It also has been host to several presidents, including President George Bush Senior and President Obama.





**The Louis Grell murals were enhanced by the use of wall mirrors as seen on these photos of the lobby and balcony stairway.**

*Images courtesy of Theatre Historical Society of America - [historictheatres.org](http://historictheatres.org)*

A boost to the vitality of the Northwest Chicago neighborhoods, the Copernicus Center, a concert, culture, and community center, is a monument to the Polish American community and its desire to retain its rich heritage while serving, and entertaining, the residents of Chicago at large.




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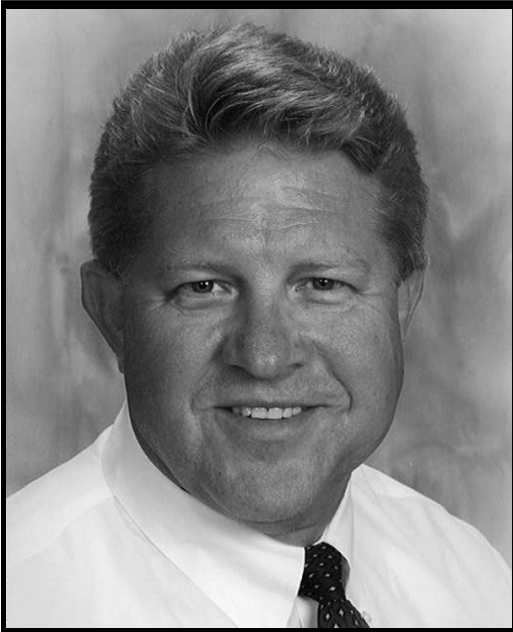
These Louis Grell murals and mirrors are gone. They have been covered up or remove. All that remains are the light fixtures and decorative air grates.

*Images courtesy of Theatre Historical Society of America.*

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## Logan Square

*By Edward Kantowicz*

Logan Square is actually a circle, not a square. The heart of this northwest side Chicago neighborhood is the city's only authentic, European-style traffic circle, with erratically careening vehicles whirling around it, entering and exiting at crazy angles.

The grassy O, surmounted by a Tennessee Marble Pillar, anchors the northwest corner of Chicago's boulevard system. Famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York's Central Park, laid out the Chicago boulevards in 1869-70. Starting at Jackson Park on the South Side, zigzagging through the West Side's Douglas and Garfield Parks, then heading north through Humboldt Park, the boulevard system ends abruptly east of Logan Square circle; for the final leg along Diversey Parkway to Lincoln Park was never completed. The northernmost sector of this system was originally named Humboldt Boulevard for the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Then when Illinois' John A. (Black Jack) Logan, a Civil War general and massively corrupt Republican politician, died in 1886, the traffic circle and the final east-west leg of the boulevard were named for him. Gradually the surrounding neighborhood took on his name as well. The pillar in Logan Square circle was added in 1918, to commemorate the centennial of Illinois statehood. Contrary to popular myth it does not feature a statue of General Logan, but simply an American Eagle.



**Logan Blvd. East of Kedzie Blvd.**

*Image courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*



**Logan Square Business District**



**Logan Square Buick – 2470 Milwaukee and later became part of the Megamall**

*Images courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*

Government documents list Logan Square as Community Area #22, in the official roster of Chicago neighborhoods first devised by University of Chicago sociologists in the early 20th century. The neighborhood stretches from the north branch of the Chicago River on the east to a railroad line just west of Pulaski Road, and from Diversey Avenue on the north to the former rail line, now the 606 bicycle trail, along Bloomingdale Avenue on the south. The iconic traffic circle is not actually the geographic center of the neighborhood (Palmer Square a quarter mile to the south is closer to that distinction), but it remains the symbolic heart of the 'hood.

The grassy boulevard lined with stately, well-preserved mansions catches the eye of a casual visitor, but Logan Square is far from an elite neighborhood. In fact, its inhabitants are, and always have been, very diverse, ethnically and religiously, even by Chicago's multicultural standards.

As a relative newcomer to the neighborhood, I had a quaint introduction to this diversity when I purchased a two-flat shortly before the turn of the century. My son had recently graduated from college and was living in a basement apartment in a newly trendy neighborhood. The first time I looked around his subterranean digs I remarked, "Why don't we get serious about real estate and you can live in my basement. Or better yet, let's find a two-flat and you can live upstairs." We soon held a family conference and my wife and I laid out specifications for the proposed house purchase, mainly dealing with price and transportation convenience. After my son went back to his underground residence, vowing to get on his moped the very next day and find someplace to settle, my wife and I turned to each other and exclaimed, "This is never going to happen."



**Logan Square's grassy boulevard lined with stately, well-preserved mansions.**

*Image courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*

# Our Lady of Victory Church

*A Parish Community in the Roman Catholic Tradition*



**Our Lady of Victory Parish was honored to host Chicago Architecture Foundation's Open House Chicago.**

We welcome you!

Have you been away from the Church for a while? Do you feel like something is calling you back? Our parish family extends an invitation for you to join us as we celebrate Sunday Eucharist. As your brothers and sisters in our worldwide Catholic family, we want you to be part of our celebration. Our Church is not complete without you; you have been missed!

At Our Lady of Victory, you'll find an active congregation that encounters spirituality through many forms: clubs for all ages, continuing education, and music ministry with adult, teen, and chamber choirs.

Regardless of your situation, you can always return to experience the sacraments and the fullness of relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church. We hope you accept this as your invitation to rediscover the truth, wonder and mystery of the Catholic faith. We will always welcome you home at Our Lady of Victory.

Reverend Robert Fedek, Pastor

For more information about Mass schedules and specific programs, visit us at:  
[www.olvchicago.org/](http://www.olvchicago.org/)

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It took him two days. He found a two-flat a couple of blocks from the Logan Square circle with a for sale sign outside. Knocking on the door, he startled a Cuban-American homeowner who had only advertised in Spanish language publications. When I returned the next day with my son, the would-be seller waxed enthusiastic about the neighborhood: "There are three 'races' living on this block," he began, "Hispanic, Polish, and white." I thought to myself, "Hey, two out of three ain't bad," and offered a down payment.

We have lived in Logan Square for nearly twenty years now, and the ethnic diversity has been all that our home seller promised and more. The young couple just next door represented the "white" race and next to them lived an elderly Polish couple who I originally thought were husband and wife but proved to be brother and sister, who had lived in their ancestral homestead from time immemorial, or so it seemed. The owner of the two-flat on the other side of us was originally from Honduras, but had worked much of his life as a merchant seaman based in Hamburg, Germany. Since one of my daughters-in-law had lived in Hamburg, we had an unexpected connection. His upstairs tenant was a skilled glassworker from the Appalachian South, married to a Latina. I still have some of his mirrors in my basement. Across the alley was a scattered-site public housing development, with mainly African-American families. Finally, presiding over the whole scene, a young man sat most of the day in the open, second-storey, window of an apartment building, with his shirt off, playing loud Latin music and hoping to be noticed by young ladies. We called him the "Salsa King."

A brief historical sketch may help to understand the diversity and vibrancy of the neighborhood. A syndicate of New England Yankees bought a tract of land in 1854, outside the Chicago city limits in the township of Jefferson. They carved the open prairies into building lots and christened the area Maplewood, with leafy-sounding street names such as Fairview (now Artesian) and Forest (now Campbell). The development took off as a railroad suburb when the Northwestern Railroad opened a commuter station at Diversey and Rockwell in 1870.



**Logan Blvd east of Troy Street**

*Image courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*

After the great Chicago Fire of 1871, the city required brick or stone construction in the rebuilt districts. Maplewood, however, remained outside the city limits until 1889, so lower income settlers built modest wooden cottages near the railroad while wealthier suburbanites raised stately mansions along the boulevard. When the L reached Logan Square in 1895, it stamped a permanent middle-class commuter identity on the neighborhood.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Logan Square's people were overwhelmingly of northern European origins. Unlike much of immigrant Chicago, the Catholic Church's presence was relatively marginal. The Catholic archbishop of the era followed a general policy of establishing a Catholic parish within each square mile of Chicago's territory, but he fell short of this goal in Logan Square. If you dropped a half-mile long plumb line from the column in Logan Square and rotated it to form a circle with a radius of one mile, you would not hit a single Catholic church. Three Catholic parishes were established in the neighborhood but only on the periphery. Most of the Germans and Scandinavians in the area were Lutherans and the inhabitants listed in the census as "Russians" were undoubtedly Jewish.



**Logan Square Baptist Church ca 1947** *Image courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*

Chicago's largest Polish-American community, alternatively known as Polonia or Polish Downtown, lay just to the south of Logan Square. Some of the largest Catholic churches in the city, and indeed in the country, created virtual Polish villages, with customs and organizations transplanted from the old country. In the first half of the twentieth century, many Polish-Americans moved into Logan Square, but they moved as individuals and families, and never dominated the neighborhood demographically or culturally. Those Poles who desired a more all-encompassing ethnic lifestyle leaped over Logan Square to the parish of St. Hyacinth, just to the north in Avondale.

Logan Square was fully built up by the 1920s, reaching its peak population of 114,174 in 1930. The neighborhood was thoroughly mixed, with 33,856 (30%) foreign-born residents, 53,968 (47%) American-born with foreign parents, 26,262 (23%) American-born with American parents. Poles were the largest single group among the foreign-born, numbering 11,328; but that figure represented only about ten percent of the whole neighborhood. According to the centennial history of St. John Berchmans Catholic church, the parish celebrated 55 weddings in 1970; 32 of these unions (58%) were ethnically mixed and 21 marriages (38%) were religiously diverse. The marriage partners belonged to 15 different ethnic groups – Belgian, Polish, Italian, German, Irish, Hungarian, Filipino, Puerto Rican, Ecuadorean, Romanian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Mexican, French, and Greek.

In the years after 1970, the Spanish language became increasingly common on the streets and boulevards of Logan Square. The 1970 census takers identified 15,765 of the community area's 88,395 residents (18%) as Spanish-speakers. Ten years later, the Spanish-speaking had increased to 29% of the neighborhood's population, and by 1990 this percentage mounted to 65%. Unlike the Poles in earlier decades, the Hispanics actually formed a majority of the neighborhood's population by the end of the twentieth century. Yet one of the distinctive features of Latino immigration to Chicago is the plurality of its sources. The terms "Latino" or "Hispanic" conceal the fact that Spanish-speaking migrants include Mexicans, Cubans, Central-Americans, and Puerto Ricans (who are American citizens by birth, not foreign-born immigrants). The Latino population of Logan Square was not wealthy, but the neighborhood's median income and poverty rate were only slightly worse than the city-wide averages.

A major reason why Logan Square weathered the twentieth century's urban ills relatively well is the nature of its housing stock. The numerous two-flats and three-flats which line most of the streets (aside from the boulevards) are the neighborhood's secret weapon against blight. The simple Chicago two-flats, almost identical in style and layout, except for differing facade treatments, have offered entry-level housing for generations of aspiring middle-class residents. They permit extended families (like mine) to live together in relative harmony, with grandma and grandpa downstairs, son or daughter with the grandchildren upstairs. Alternatively, a smaller family can rent out one apartment and help pay off the mortgage. The housing stock presents a dense, urban face to the street, but also provides back yards for amateur gardeners.

Since the buildings are owner-occupied they resist physical dilapidation. Though the neighborhood has suffered from gang violence, it largely escaped the terrible plague of arson fires that devastated other neighborhoods in the 1970s, particularly Humboldt Park just to the south. Logan Square has not carried the burden of burnt out buildings and numerous vacant lots that so blighted Humboldt Park. The two-flats and three-flats have proven its salvation. Whatever hard times the area faced, it remained a neighborhood of resident property owners rather than absentee landlords.

The neighborhood has continued to change in the twenty-first century. According to the local newspaper published by dna info, "between 2000 and 2014, about 19,200 Hispanic residents moved out of Logan Square . . . [and] the white population increased by about 10,340 residents." Since many of the newcomers are young and single, the overall population of the area has declined a bit to around 76,000.

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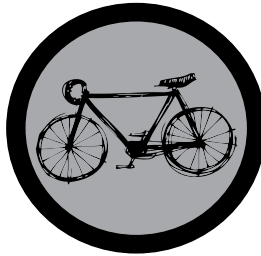
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My immediate block reflected these trends. Death, divorce, and landlord-tenant squabbles removed some of the neighbors who used to live nearby. However, one new “race”, South Asian, has been added to the mix. And, much to our relief, the Salsa King has gone, replaced by a young Latino family. As an indication of how much the area is changing, a co-op organic grocery will soon open its doors around the corner at one end of the block, and at the other end an evangelical church has been sold to a circus school (I’m not making this up).

These changes are not to everyone’s tastes. Some community activists protest them as “gentrification” that displaces lower income and working class residents. However, the two-flat experience, Logan Square’s secret weapon, does add a layer of complexity to the gentrification story. Since most of the housing stock is owner-occupied, some of the so-called displacement actually means that previous owners have cashed out and moved on to new phases of their lives. That was certainly the case with the man who sold our two-flat to us and with the former merchant seaman next door. Both retired and moved to Florida.

Admittedly, we did ask the family living upstairs to move out when our extended family moved in. I felt bad about this and they were none too pleased. However, our son ran into them a few months later and they actually thanked him, saying it was the kick in the pants they needed to go and buy their own house. “So forget your liberal guilt, Dad,” my son barked. Well, liberal guilt never really goes away and I’m sure that not all neighborhood change stories have such apparently happy endings. Citizens have every right to protest changes that affect their own interests and neighborhood life. Undesirable changes should never be considered inevitable, though some kind of change certainly is, as neighborhoods and populations are never static. An impertinent student of mine once cut right through a lecture I was giving on urban history, complete with academic verbiage, charts, and statistics. “What you’re really saying,” he remarked, “is that cities got bigger and people moved around a lot.” Exactly.

There never was a golden age in Logan Square, but there is a priceless visual record left by a people on the move through a living, and very livable, Chicago neighborhood.

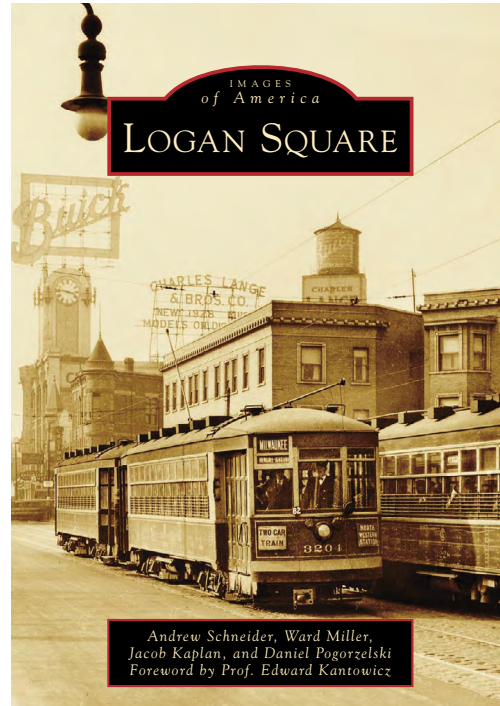


Logan Bowl - Southwest Corner of Milwaukee and Spaulding

*Image courtesy of Northwest Chicago Historical Society*

Dr. Edward R. Kantowicz is a freelance historian as well as a former professor of history at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. A resident of Logan Square, he is the author of "Corporation Sole, Cardinal Mundelein and Chicago Catholicism", "Polish-American Politics in Chicago 1880-1940", and a two volume history titled "The World in the 20th Century."

New book - Logan Square from Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series, The authors are: Andrew Schneider is president of Logan Square Preservation, Ward Miller is the executive director of Preservation Chicago, Jacob Kaplan is co-founder of Forgotten Chicago and board member of the Northwest Chicago Historical Society, and Daniel Pogorzelski is vice president of the Northwest Chicago Historical Society. The foreword is by Prof. Edward Kantowicz. The book should be available by the end of 2017



West side of Sawyer Ave north of Wrightwood Ave.  
26.

Image courtesy of Frank Suerth

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