



Northwest Chicago Historical Society

Your Neighborhood Historical Society

Newsletter July 2017

Number XXVI

Memories of My Family's Corner Grocery Store Rev. Johannes Block & His Jefferson Park Churches

We want to thank Northwest Chicago Historical Society member Michelle Kmiec for sharing her family story and pictures in this newsletter issue. The article "Memories of My Family's Corner Grocery Store" exemplifies the hard working immigrants that settled in our community over the years, looking for a better way of life. While most of the corner grocery stores are now gone, enterprising immigrants are still working long hours by starting businesses here on the Northwest Side. They have established a myriad of retail/wholesale vendors, restaurants, hotels, and other small businesses. Today, they continue to bring their language, culture, and beliefs to our Northwest Side melting pot.

In a similar vein, the Reverend Johannes Block article captures the story of the Volga-German immigrants who settled in large numbers in Jefferson Park and Mayfair neighborhoods on the Northwest Side. Despite the closing of the two churches where Reverend Block presided, many other Volga-German churches still stand; some with 3rd generation Volga-German parishioners. Today, Rev. Block's churches are residential buildings, and many of the residents may not even be aware of the rich history of their surroundings. In another example, the Volga-Germans Alex and Emily Glass operated a corner grocery store from the late 1940's to the mid 1960's. Their store was located on the southwest corner of Lawrence and Lavergne Avenues and is one of many businesses started by this ethnic/cultural group.

As always, thank you again for your support. If you have stories or photos to share, we'd love to share them with our community. Only together can we continue to preserve our history - every day a memory or a memento is lost; we want ensure that no one forgets our rich local history! - *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 We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications.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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Keep track of what is happening at the Northwest Chicago Historical Society
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NW Chicago Historical Society

P. O. Box 30067
Chicago, IL 60630

e-mail: nwchicagohistory@sbcglobal.net

Membership:

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

Website: nwchicagohistory.org

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Letters

Letters may have been edited for clarity and space

Hello, I am a northwest Chicago native who's interested in local history.

I came across the following 1919 ad for a subdivision in the Jefferson Park (around Austin and Foster to be exact).

I thought it would be of interest to your group.

Chris Szmurto
Facebook

NWCHS – Thank you! I do like the line, “Colonial Gardens – The Edgewater of the Northwest Side.”

Can you tell me anything about 1252 West Barry I know at one time it was an Ice house or the barn for the horses I believe it was the Dietz family. I lived there in the 60's and it was owned by Synder & Sons heating oil and furniture.

Ernie Hathcoat
Facebook

NWCHS - In 1913, 1252 West Barry lot size was 50 X 125 with a cottage, barn and wagon and a shed with a scale (Maybe an ice house?) Emil Diaz lived at this address in 1917 and Boy Scout Arthur Diez lived at this address in 1944

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Colonial Gardens is just one block west of the Milwaukee avenue surface line, and the Lawrence avenue car passes the property on the south. Two blocks from the Jefferson Park station of the Chicago & Northwestern railroad—a 20-minute ride into the heart of the city. A movement to extend the elevated railroad to this community has been started and is well under way.

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Greetings ! I have an original Cabinet Photo from the 1922 Chicago Executive Ice Skating Committee. It shows about three or four states represented in the competitions. I am trying to find a historical society that will preserve and protect it for all. If this is of no interest to you please reply with another organization that might show interest.

Michael Malone - Orlando Florida

NWCHS - The Chicago History Museum would be a good fit for this photo.



Photo taken in Chicago, February 25, 1922 – Possible location: Hyde Park.



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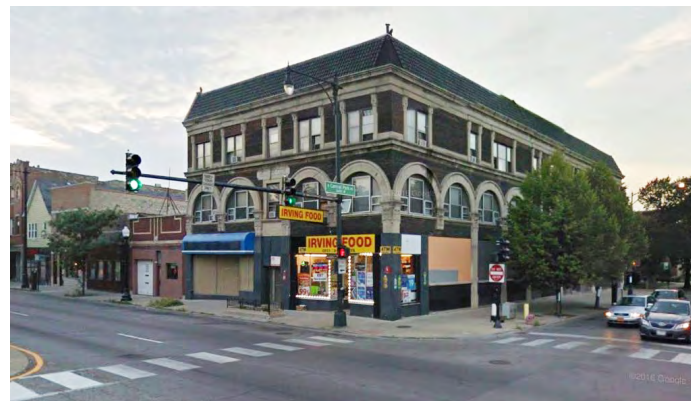
Our general meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, 7 p.m., at the Congregational Church of Jefferson Park, 5320 West Giddings, in the basement. Meetings are free and open to all.

Stop by and meet your neighbors!

Join us on Facebook and see lots of old photos like this one.



The A. H. Hill Company Building at Irving Park & Central Park. Alonzo Hill was in the real estate business from about 1890 until his death in 1937. He built 200 to 300 homes a year in the Irving Park – Elston Avenue district. The building at 3600 W. Irving Park was also home to the Hill State Bank, which Mr. Hill was president. He is buried in Graceland Cemetery.



Present day photos posted on Facebook by Frank Chambers Jr. - NWCHS member.

Northwest Chicago Historical Society Facebook photos



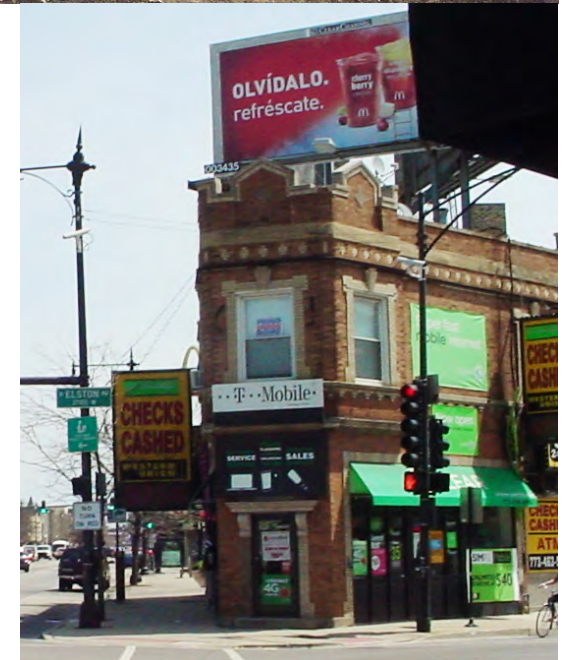
Irving Park east of Elston 1909. The building on the right is still standing.

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Northwest Chicago Historical Society Facebook photos



Irving Park West of Elston ca 1909

Memories of My Family's Corner Grocery Store

By *Mitchelle Kmiec*

(*NWCHS Member*)

THE LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY STORE - the center of the Neighborhood, the place where neighbors could meet up and “catch up,” the meeting place for walking routes to and from schools - no school buses (my grammar school was five blocks west and my high school was five blocks east), the safe place, the place where you could wait until your parents came home from work, the place where you could go and find out what’s going on in the neighborhood and how your neighbors are. If someone was sick, a baby was born or someone moved or died, this was the place you would hear about it. If there was a joyous or sorrowful occasion, this is where you could find a card being signed by everyone in the neighborhood and donations accepted to buy a gift or flowers. How do I know? I grew up in a family that had one of these “jewels.”

“The Store” of my family, that I knew, was located in Humboldt Park (this was not their first store – their previous store was located on Ohio Street). My maternal grandparents immigrated from neighboring villages (i.e. Jefferson Park/Gladstone Park) in Poland in the early 1900’s. My grandfather was 16 (arrived in 1909) and my grandmother was 18 (arrived in 1912) - neither knew English. They learned English from their customers as they knew America was their new home. Although Polish was spoken at home, my grandparents told my mother and her brothers to speak English outside of the home (the grammar school I attended stopped Polish language classes as a second language the year I started school). Of the twelve grandchildren, I believe I am the only one that has visited Poland and to my knowledge, speaks and understands Polish - even though my late brother and two of my cousins did take those Polish classes! enough to have a conversation – not an involved, lengthy one, but a conversation no less.

As is now, it was natural for people, once they arrived here in the United States, to be drawn to areas where others from their village had settled. One of the first jobs my grandfather had was working in a steel mill (his occupation upon arrival to the U.S. was “laborer”), where he was injured in his early 20’s when a piece of metal lodged in his eye – he lost his sight in that eye. This was before “worker’s compensation!” Since he arrived in the United States at a very early age, and with a limited education, he needed a trade, so he turned to being a grocer (his oldest sister was already here and had a small grocery store near Wells High School). My grandparents were married at St. John Cantius Church and settled on the north side – the last being Humboldt Park.



The family grocery store - 1459 N. Campbell Ave. Photo taken in 1931.

Photo Courtesy of Mitchell Kmiec



My mother Helen, holding my brother with my grandparents and some customers in front of store (1950-51)

Photo Courtesy of Mitchell Kmiec



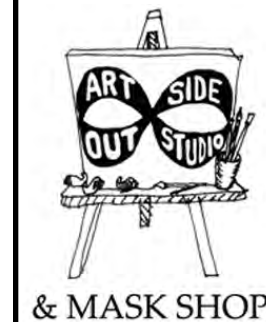
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Catering



Stanley Kwiecien with little dog in front of store. Photo 1931

Photos Courtesy of Michelle Kniec

My grandparents opened their store in Humboldt Park in 1925-1926. A few of the stories my mom passed on were when a man came to the store and took a fish from the barrel and put it inside his coat, hoping to get away without paying, but my great-uncle saw him do this and merely added it to his bill. When he inquired what the extra charge was for, my great-uncle politely said "for the fish in your pocket!" He paid his bill and left. She also told me how she helped in the store and how my grandfather refused to pay "protection" money and the next day, the windows of the store were broken. He still refused. The store had been robbed once and she had to go to a line up, and one of the men in the line up was "Baby Face Nelson" and that a girl down the block was also dating one of the members of Al Capone's "associates" – she said he was very nice and polite!! These were the "early" years!

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Maria Kosiniak in front of the store, watering the delivery horse from Pure Farm Product Company, 1838 Augusta Blvd. Stas's tavern storefront can be seen across the street.

Photo Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec



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World War II came and my mother and three of her brothers joined the U.S. Navy. My mother was an interpreter stationed in Washington, D.C., one uncle, was stationed on an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific, another uncle was stationed in California, and the last uncle was a “storekeeper” at Great Lakes Naval Base (a fourth uncle who was born in 1934 later served in the U. S. Army). Although my Uncle Ted, the “storekeeper” had about a year to complete at DePaul University to be a pharmacist, he chose to take over the duties of the family business and continued this business until he retired in the 1970’s and relocated to the “farm” in Indiana, where my grandparents had a 52 acre apple orchard. In my eyes, he was the “go to” man – he knew everything about everything (he often would help me with my homework before my mom got home or sometimes, after the store closed).

The store was located on a corner – in a three story – 6 flat (apartments) with a two car unattached garage. We had a small yard that was fenced in with privacy fencing and had a big empty lot next door. The store was in the front and my grandparents lived in a four room apartment on the first floor in the back. I lived with my parents and my brother in a four room apartment on the second floor back

and my Uncle Ted and Aunt Stella and my two cousins lived in a four room apartment on the third floor back. There was also a six room apartment on the second floor front and a split six room apartment on the third floor front (this was split to help with housing during the Depression – two apartments that shared a bathroom that was located in the middle of the two) that were rented out. The stairs in the hall were wooden and were “scrubbed” and “bleached” every Saturday. Back then, every other corner in a neighborhood housed either a grocery store or a tavern. There was another grocery store one block east and another one block south, but neither of those stores had a “butcher” – just canned goods and the mere necessities. There was Stas’s tavern across the street from us, a tavern one block east, and one block south of us. Also, a block south of us was “Pa’s,” a “candy store” that also sold the Polish papers and school supplies. Initially, I recall our family store was open seven days a week 6 A.M. – 8 P.M., except for Sundays which were “half days.” Later it was reduced to six days a week, still from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. (Closed Sundays). Toward the end, the hours were shortened even more, but still six days a week. Yet, even though the store closed at 8 P.M., you would still be able to come to the “back door” after hours if you forgot “an” item, and if my Uncle or Aunt were still around, they would let you in.



My mom, Helen (Kwiecien) Kmiec and three of her brothers - Eugene (Gene), Thaddeus (Ted), and Chester.
Photo Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec



Two views of the inside of the store in the earlier years. *Photos Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec*

The store itself, working from the back to the front, had a small kitchen with a small area above the butcher station that contained a bunk bed (you would need a ladder to get up there and where I would hide from my mother), a small elevated storeroom (where there was a toilet). Moving forward was the small butcher shop area with a butcher block in the corner (with knives stored on it's side, which was scrubbed and cleaned every day), a slicing machine, a scale, a "cubing" machine" and a counter containing fresh meats with an adjacent huge walk in refrigerator - not much walking room, that's for sure! Then came the store itself. Outside of the walk-in refrigerator, were wall coolers containing eggs, milk and other dairy products and cold soda across from the bottled soft drink stock. The walls on the two outer sides of the store contained shelving, about six feet high, and there was six foot shelving in the middle of the store that were stocked on both sides with canned goods (by category – fruits, jams, condiments, soaps, etc.). The top shelves on one outer wall were reserved for boxes of soap - often containing a "gift" - a piece of dinnerware or glassware or a towel - if not, there was a coupon on the back for something like a doll (which I would be the recipient of thanks to my "Busia"). The floor was made of wooden slats, and early on, saw dust was spread over the floor and an occasional wooden barrel containing sauerkraut or herring. The ceilings were very high (or at least seemed that way to me!) and there were ceiling fans. The huge windows at the front of the store were half the height of the store itself. At the front of the store was the check-out counter and this small area harbored a cash register, a scale, fresh rye bread under the counter, cigarettes and medical amenities behind the counter and a milk crate to sit on.

Next to the register was a small wooden box that contained three by five index cards with a name, address and phone number written at the top - this was the credit card system! Many customers would come in, shop around and put their purchase "on credit" – no matter how big or small. The cards would be tallied and ready for distribution at the end of each month, with a register tape wrapped around the card, waiting for you (my aunt would let me "run" the tapes!). It was the honor system! For the most part, it worked well. Yes, there were a few who reneged on their promise, but then they were no longer afforded to put things on credit. Adjacent to the checkout counter was the "penny candy/bakery counter." Near the entrance (there was only one way in/out for customers) was an ice cream/popsicle freezer (other than this, there were no "frozen foods"). Also near the front entrance was a fresh fruit/vegetable stand that was topped with paper products on the top shelf. When we would "lock up" for the night, no cameras, no alarms, just a piece of two by four, the width of the two front doors, placed in two brackets on the inside (one on the outer side of each door) was the only "lock" on the front doors! No keys!!!

Inventory for the store was from Randolph-Fulton Markets and South Water Street Market – fresh meats, eggs and fruits/vegetables. My uncle would let me go with him when I was off from school and I was able to go into even bigger coolers and walk amid the hanging meats and watch the meat being cut by men in stained long white coats carrying huge knives. Bakery was delivered daily, BEFORE 6 A.M., from Augusta Bakery, and trays of cakes and freshly made breads were placed on the stairway adjacent to my grandparents' apartment door along with a bag of freshly baked buns – STILL WARM! If you took anything, you would later just tell my uncle/aunt what you took and pay for it then or put it on your card. There was an honor system. Dairy products and luncheon meats were delivered by vendors and there was also the "Penny Candy" vendor. My aunt would often times tell me to go into the truck and pick what I thought would sell and then I would stock the counter and bag the candy when a kid would come in to redeem a bottle for two cents. Talk about a "kid in a candy store!" We had little bags if you were getting more than ten pieces!! On my days off from school, or after school, I would help my aunt and uncle in the store, stocking shelves, "stamping" prices on the canned goods, bagging groceries (I think this was my favorite), delivering groceries, or sweeping the floor. There was no charge for deliveries. If you were sick and needed groceries, you could just call and the order would be delivered. There was a "payphone" by the back door, in the small kitchen and next to it, on the wall, was the phone directory - written phone numbers – of vendors, customers and family. Orders were placed on pieces of "butcher wrap." Everyone WAS family! (My brother and I, along with my two cousins, would deliver the orders and would make a few dollars – especially during snow storms using our sleds.)



Maria Kosiniak at the counter.

Photo Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec

WPB Special Service Area #33 enhances the unique qualities of life in the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods by providing supplemental city services, including:

- Sidewalk cleaning & garbage removal
 - Sidewalk snowplowing
- Community grants to support local events
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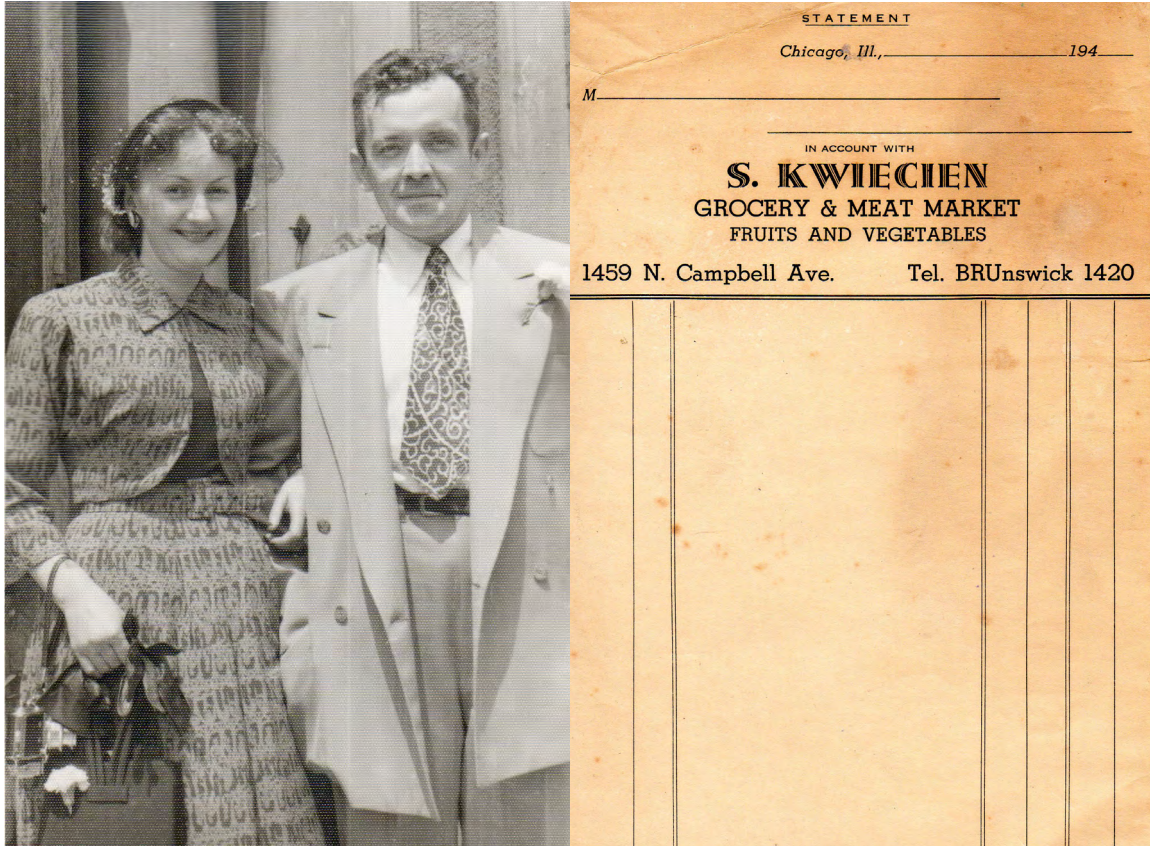


WickerParkBucktown.org



Another view of the Family Corner Grocery Store. The building still remains but it has been transformed into condos – even the store. *Photo Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec*

Although my grandparents were no longer the proprietors of the store, they still helped out. My grandmother passed away in 1959 but my grandfather continued to help until he passed in 1971 – cutting meat on occasion, “dressing” fresh chickens/ducks/rabbits which he raised on the farm. Most of all he made Polish Sausage EVERY week – 52 weeks a year – both “fresh” and “smoked.” The process, except for the holidays, would begin on Wednesday, when my uncle would cut up the meat and place it in a huge steel tub – about 36 inches in diameter. He would then add the “brine” – spices of salt, pepper, garlic and ??? and mix it all together and store it in the “walk in”. On Thursday, my grandfather would bring out the steel tub with the brined sausage meat and put it next to the small table in the kitchen, where there was huge round stuffing cylinder that he would fill with the brined meat and, along with the casing that soaked in water to get rid of the salt it was stored in, he would begin making sausage on a hand cranked sausage maker. He would first stuff the casing and then would make about foot long lengths without measuring and turn it to make a “knot” and continue on until all of the meat was gone. The sausage would then be divided into fresh links and links to be smoked. The “smoking” came in the evening on Thursday, after the store closed. There was a HUGE concrete smoker in our unfinished basement. The fuel for the fire was usually wood from the apple trees from the farm. Often times I would sit down there with my uncle or my cousin or my brother, tending to the fire, while we talked about everything, solved world problems or just joked around. Eventually, my cousin and brother knew when the smoking process was done so there was no need for supervision from my grandfather or my uncle. The sausage was now ready for sale on Friday and Saturday. During Easter and Christmas, my grandfather had to start making sausage about two weeks before because people would come from all over – even those that moved away, sometimes out of state, would come back. At Easter, my aunt would also make butter lambs in a wooden mold and homemade horseradish (grated by hand NOT by blender or food processor) to sell in the store. Sure wish I had that butter mold or that sausage maker!



Ted & Stella Kwiecien who took over the store and a store 1940 order form at the right.
Photos Courtesy of Michelle Kmiec

The other holidays I remember were Halloween and Christmas. At Halloween, I would help pass out home grown apples after school until I went Trick-or-Treating and at Christmas, Christmas trees from the farm were lined up along the side of the house and sold.

Besides the food vendors that would stop by, you could often witness the knife sharpener, the rag man, a vegetable/fruit horse-drawn truck and/or an ice truck make an appearance. Occasionally, Oscar Meyer would stop by with his "wiener" mobile and pass out whistles to the kids, or there was the guy (who I recall looked like "Col. Sanders") with the small pony hooked up to a small wagon who charged ten cents a ride to take you around the block, about eight kids at a time.

Slowly, major grocers were taking over - Del Farm, National, A & P (precursors to Jewel, Dominick, Butera, Marianos) and the neighborhood grocery stores could no longer sustain themselves. My grandfather died in 1971 (having read the full set of encyclopedia in English before he died) and my aunt and uncle retired in the mid-1970's and moved to Indiana - they have both since passed. My immediate family moved to Jefferson Park in December, 1973.

This is what I remember. I feel very lucky to have been a part of this. GREAT memories - memories no one can take away from me and memories that will remain with me forever – and ever – and ever!!

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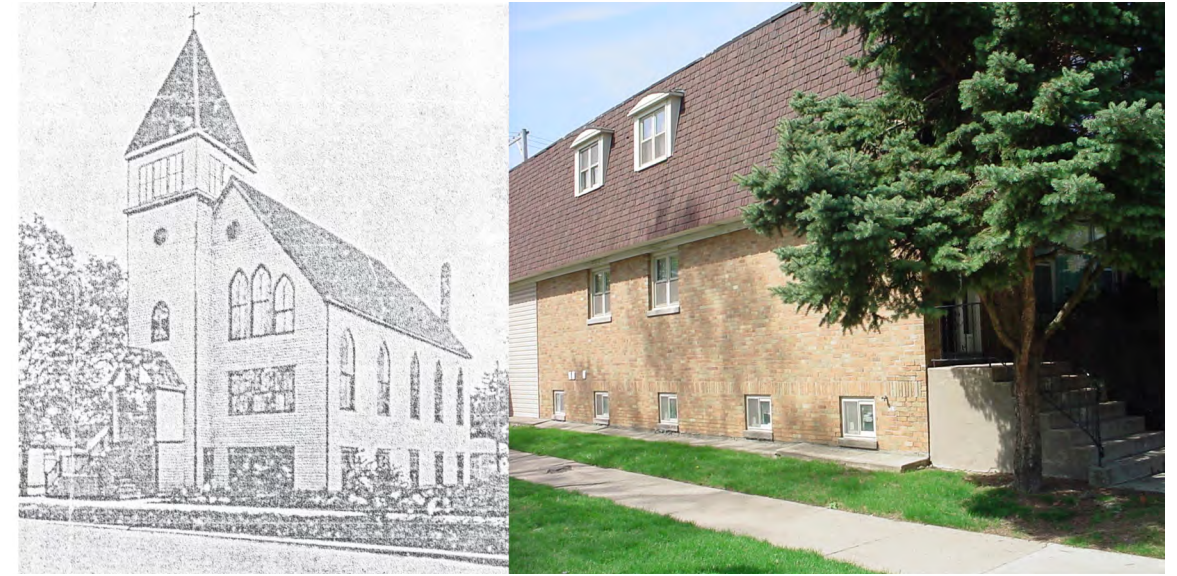
Rev. Johannes Block & His Jefferson Park Churches

By Frank Suerth



There were two churches in Jefferson Park to have been started by Rev. Johannes Block, a German who emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1886 and who was believed by historians responsible for leading the immigration of Volga-Germans to Jefferson Park. The first, the German Evangelical Congregational Church was located at 5216 W. Winona, Chicago, where he was pastor. (The church is upper left, and what it looks like now is the lower left)

The parsonage for the German Evangelical Congregational Church (Upper photo, right side and lower right) was separated by two city lots and located at 5208 W. Winona, Chicago, and according to the Cook County Assessor's website, was built in 1907, thus the church itself most likely was built around the same time. It is believed that the lots were set aside for a graveyard, which never transpired. The church is now a four unit residential building, the parsonage is now a single-family residence and single-family homes were built on the lots.



St. John's Evangelical Church, built in 1892, was located at 5200 W. Argyle Street and after much renovation, is now a multi-family residence. Photos Courtesy of Frank Suerth

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Rev. Johannas Block

The second church was St. John's Evangelical Church and is believed to have been built in 1892. It was located at 5200 W. Argyle Street, Chicago. Rev. Block, along with his wife Helen lived at 5255 W. Argyle Street, Chicago, across the street from what is now Roberts Square. They had three daughters, Ester (Coggins), Lydia (Lenz) and Adele (Cottingham).



Rev. Block passed away in 1950 and his wife Helen passed away in 1944. They are buried at Union Ridge Cemetery, 6700 W. Higgins, Chicago.

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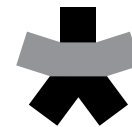


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