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# Northwest Chicago Historical Society

*Your Neighborhood Historical Society*

Newsletter – July 2009

Number X

**In This Issue:**

**Simon H. Cripe**

• **Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village**

The end is the beginning and the beginning is the end, so the old saying goes. The Jefferson Park Historical Society now begins its new life as “The Northwest Chicago Historical Society.” This change is not a step that we took lightly and involved months of careful thought, planning and deliberation. Above all, our mission still remains the same: to preserve the stories and artifacts of our fair corner of Chicago, so often neglected in the overall conversation of Chicago History, before they're irrevocably lost.

We've begun ramping up our activities, with two very successful events under our belts. The first was a lecture and meeting with Bob Schwartz, author and VP at Vienna Beef about the very interesting history of the Chicago Hot Dog. The second was a lecture about the uniquely fascinating Volga Germans and their enclave in Jefferson Park in days gone by, organized in conjunction with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. We are also going to be present at three upcoming fests on the Northwest Side in the coming months: Jeff Fest and Irish Fest in July as well as Taste of Polonia over Labor Day Weekend. We encourage all of you to keep your eyes peeled for us at these events and hope to see you there!

We have a number of potential events in the works, including a trip and guided tour through Bridgeport, Chicago's political nexus. We will also be creating our first “Historic Pub Crawl” focusing on a number of fair Irish establishments this time around. We've also launched a new website and an online group on MeetUp.com to keep folks up-to-date on all our events online, in addition to another couple of surprises we're still wrapping up. So pay attention and look alive, because we've got big things coming your way, and we'd love to have you along for the ride. - Dan Pogorzelski

**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 We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications.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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# Letters

*Letters have been edited for clarity and space.*

I was excited to see your website regarding the Jefferson Park Historical Society and I have spent the past 2 hours reading the newsletters online. It was quite interesting to say the least.

The reason I am writing to you is because back in the 1940's, my parents Henry and Lucille Flug, owned a business on the corner of Lawrence and Lavergne Avenues called the Avalon Tap. It was a small neighborhood bar mostly visited by local clientele and workers from the nearby factory. The bar fronted Lawrence Avenue and sided on Lavergne. My parents lived in the family residence behind the bar located in the same building. My mother seems to think the address was 4958 Lawrence Avenue. There was a public park across the street from the bar and diagonally across Lawrence Avenue from the bar there was a neighborhood grocery store/meat store owned by a German couple by the name of Alex and Emily Glass. Mr. and Mrs. Glass operated their grocery store from the late 1940's through the mid 1960's when they retired and located to DeLeon Springs, Florida. Early on, many German residents from the local neighborhood visited their store daily for their groceries.

Just as a point of interest, my grandparents on my father's side (Flug) were one of the pioneers of Eden's Evangelical Church. They were Germans who emigrated from Russia and along with a large group of German immigrants were instrumental in founding the church. Both of their funerals were held at Eden's Church with services at May's Funeral Home (late 1947/1953). Both were buried at St. Lucas (Lukes) Cemetery in Chicago.

When we visited Jefferson Park briefly for the day in 1989, a section of the building that once was the Avalon Tap had been demolished. The area that was once the bar was a dirt/pebble parking area. Sadly, my parents had no photos of the street front showing the Avalon Tap. I was curious whether your archives or residents that contribute old photos or snapshots might by chance have a photograph of the Avalon from the 1940's? Our family has often shared memories of their years in Jefferson Park and at the Avalon Tap and we are sadly missing photos. A few family members have spent the better part of this evening gathered around the computer looking at the old photos from your newsletters.

I would be interested to hear what you might have regarding photos of this building. Thanks for listening.

With Kind Regards,

Michael Flug – Daytona Beach, Florida

*We are always looking for old photos but do not have any photos of the Avalon Tap. Maybe someone who reads this letter has a picture or two. The neighborhood grocery store has been a bar for many years and is now called Grealy's Pub. As for the Eden Evangelical Lutheran Church, they are now celebrating their 95<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. - NWCHS*

**DO NOT HIDE YOUR OLD PICTURES!**

Please share them with the Northwest Chicago Historical Society. The Society will scan your photo and return it while you wait.



# Letters


I have spoken with my brother and a mutual friend of ours about our experiences as long-ago residents of Jefferson Park and students at Beaubien Elementary School, especially with regard to schoolmates who were offspring of Volga-German immigrants who settled in Jefferson Park. Our memories are childhood memories of long ago, as many as 70 years ago and rather faded. We remember German surnames such as Borgart, Hoppe, Kramer, Krause, Off, Schnarr, Schweiger and Schweigert. But, rather than coming from Germany, their parents emigrated from Russia. I remember at the age of eleven years, when Hitler ordered the German Army to invade Russia in 1941 the kids from the Volga German, or Russian-German, enclave reflected the conflicted emotions that their parents were experiencing as a direct result of the invasion. They were German descendants whose German culture was maintained for about 1 century in Russia. Yet they were Russians who spoke Russian also and their homeland was being invaded. As we remember it, the ethnic majority of students in Beaubien were the Russian-German kids and, as we remember it, the majority of the schoolyard bullies at that time were Russian-German boys. Their attempted dominance also spilled over into the playground at Jefferson Park. In fact, directly across Higgins Avenue from the Jefferson Park field house there was a large three-story wooden tenement building, which had many apartments in it. It could have had as many as 12 units in it. The non-Russian German kids nicknamed it the "Russian Hotel". In time, it was later demolished for the two, six-unit, apartment buildings now located at 5440-5444 W. Higgins Avenue.

I vaguely remember that some of the Russian-German families might have belonged to the Eden United Church of Christ at the corner of Gunnison Street and LeClaire Avenue (north of the Kennedy Expressway). Some of the other families might have belonged to another church one block east of Eden Church on the corner of Gunnison Street and Lavergne Avenue. It is possible that it could have been founded by a group of Slovak Lutherans. The Czecho-Slovak Hall building on Lawrence Avenue is not far from it. The original name of the church was engraved in the lintel over its front entrance. But, the name was filled-in with cement much later and is illegible. There was an enclave of Slovaks in that vicinity and in the vicinity of Lawrence and Elston Avenues. The Sokol Gymnastics Society branch on Elston Avenue, north of the intersection was established by Slovaks. The name Sokol is translated into English as 'falcon', as I believe it is in Polish. Another enclave of Slovaks was located in the vicinity of the Immanuel Slovak Baptist Church, at the corner of Giddings Street and Marmora Avenue. That same congregation later changed its name to New Covenant Baptist Church.

Allan J. Firak - Oriole Park, Chicago

4.

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We welcome you to join with us in our celebration of God's Word.

Reverend Christopher Doering, *Pastor*

5.

## Simon H. Cripe

By Frank Suerth

Simon H. Cripe was born on June 29, 1864 in Goshen, Indiana, one of twelve children born to Tobias Cripe and Barbara Burkett. They were part of a large clan of Cripes that lived in Elkhart County, Indiana that could trace their roots back to the late 1700's in Ohio.

In 1885, Simon followed a young lady named Mary Miller to Kansas to persuade her to marry him. He was successful and they were married in Peabody, Kansas on November 5, 1885. Mary was born in Middleburg, Indiana on March 25, 1863.

After working as a carpenter for four years in Kansas, Simon moved to Chicago in the same year Jefferson Township was annexed to Chicago. In 1893, the year of the Columbian Exposition, and one year after the last tollgate on Milwaukee (at Leland) was burned down, Simon, his wife Mary and three daughters moved to Jefferson Park.

Jefferson Park at that time had 1,000 residents and only one telephone. The telephone was in Townsen Saloon at what is now Milwaukee Avenue and Ainslie Street. Townsen paid \$150.00 per year for the phone service and charged his customers to use the phone to help recoup his cost.

In 1893, Simon Cripe found Jefferson Park to be a mud flat, suitable mostly for onion farming. Milwaukee Avenue was a plank road and planks covering some of the muddy walkways. The stores had six or seven steps from the wooden sidewalks to the front doors. One would walk up and down, going from shop to shop. There was no gas, no sewers and no electric lights for this small Chicago neighborhood.

The only transportation offered to the residents was the Northwestern Railroad. And if you missed the last train, the only way home was the Milwaukee Avenue streetcar line that terminated at Belmont, followed by a long muddy walk.



**Simon H. Cripe - Photo taken on March 4, 1915 by Edward Fox at his studio at 2003 Milwaukee Avenue.**

*Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt*

6.

Edward Fox

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**The Simon Cripe Family. From left to right; Simon, Dora, Mary, Leona, Ruby. CA 1902**

*Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt*

In the 1900 census, Simon is living at 3553 Carpenter Ct., which would now be 5442 Lovejoy Ave. It lists his occupation as carpenter and maybe they named this street after him. He is living with his wife Mary and three daughters: 13 year-old Dora born in September of 1886, 12 year-old Leona born in November of 1887, and 11 year-old Ruby born in February of 1889. All the girls were listed as being born in Kansas and going to school. The school was most likely the Jefferson School that burned down in 1905 and was replaced by the Beaubien School. Simon's brother Jacob Cripe is also in the 1900 census and lives at what

is now 5011 W. Strong Avenue with his wife Clara and 6 year-old daughter Cleopatra. Jacob is also listed as a carpenter and has lived in Chicago for less than 6 years.

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7.





**The Cripe Brothers; Jesse on the left and Simon on the right standing in front of their storefront. The old address is shown above the door, the address now is 4770 N. Milwaukee Ave. They sold houses, insurance, hardware and keys out of this Milwaukee**

**Avenue address. Simon turned this store into Jefferson Park's first nickelodeon movie house some years later. The building was most likely built by the Cripe brother and is still standing. After more than 100 years, insurance is still being sold out of the storefront, it is now home to Michael A. Scavo – State Farm Insurance Agent.**

*Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt*

8.



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Simon opened a storefront at what is now 4770 N. Milwaukee Avenue and some of his brothers soon joined him. The Cripe Brothers, Simon, Jesse, Jacob, and Samuel built and sold houses, hardware and insurance. Simon would show prospective homebuyers around the muddy area in a horse and buggy. They must have kept very busy in those early years because it was said that the brothers built half the business district. Simon was the oldest with Jacob 4 years younger, Sam 11 years younger, and Jesse 20 years his junior.

Jesse Cripe shows up in the 1910 census with his wife Kate and 4 year-old son Laminar (LaMar). Jesse is in the real estate business and has only been in Chicago for a few years. They are living at 4817 Milwaukee Avenue, most likely living over a storefront. In the 1920 census they are still living at the same Milwaukee Avenue address.

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**Top row left to right; Mrs. Rudy Christensen, Mrs. Leona Schmitt, and Mrs. Dora Keck. Bottom Row left to right; Simon Cripe and Mary Cripe. CA 1912**

9.

*Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt*





Mary Miller Cripe, sitting in her living room. Through the open door you can see the dining room with table, a chandelier, 6 books, old two-piece table telephone and two rocking chairs.

Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt

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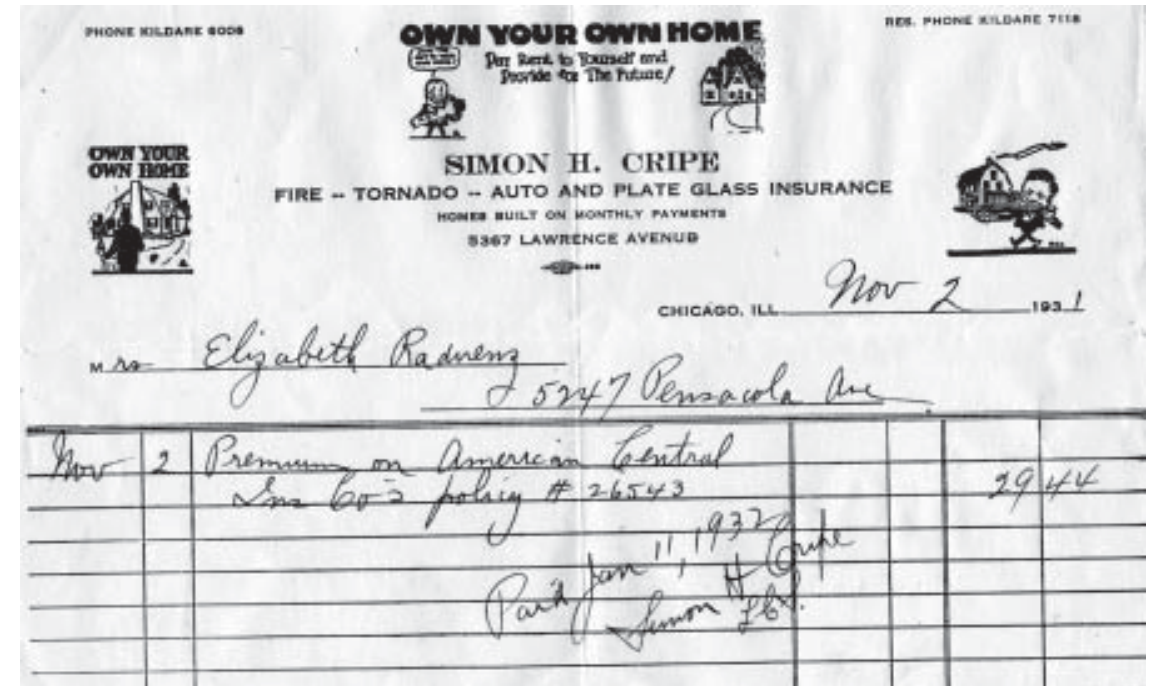
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Also in the 1920 census, Jacob Cripe with his wife Clara and three children are living at 4803 Milwaukee Avenue. Jacob is listed as a hardware store dealer. Sam Cripe is living around the corner at 5369 Lawrence with his wife Maude and brother-in-law Earl. Sam is also listed as running a hardware store.

Simon remembered when automobiles started showing up in Jefferson Park, frightening both people and horses. In 1912 Bill Townsen organized an automobile race to Libertyville and back. About fifteen cars started out on a Sunday afternoon with Townsen following with a team of horses and buggy. Only about three cars finished the complete race.

Simon Cripe opened the first nickelodeon movie house in Jefferson Park. It was located at the same 4770 Milwaukee storefront address. One movie shown there was *The Great Train Robbery*, complemented by a talented piano player.



A Simon H. Cripe insurance receipt from Nov 2, 1931. The receipt was for American Central Insurance for Elizabeth Radnenz of 5247 Pensacola Ave. It looks like Simon's daughter Leona Schmitt signed his name to the receipt.

In the 1920 census, Simon Cripe with his wife Mary and one daughter Leona are living at 5121 Strong St. Simon is listed as working in real estate and Leona is a bookkeeper at a paint factory.

Sometime in the 1920's, Simon moved his business to 5369 W. Lawrence which is where the western portion of the Jefferson Park library now stands. Simon still did carpenter work, sold homes and insurance but also had a large locksmith business. By 1935 his locksmith shop had 27,000 keys in inventory. His grandson Stanley Keck ran the key shop and his brothers Jesse and Samuel repaired and sharpened saws and lawnmowers in the back and at a building next door. Sometime in the 1960's Stanley Keck moved the key shop to Lawrence Avenue closer to Austin Avenue.

On November 5, 1935, Simon and Mary celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Mary died 8 months later. Later on, Simon married his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife Grace who he also out lived. They lived at 4424 N. LaPorte. Grace died in 1949.

85 year-old Simon Cripe died at Belmont Hospital on February 16, 1950 and is buried in Acacia Park Cemetery. Jesse Cripe died in 1957 and is buried at Union Ridge Cemetery. Jacob Cripe died on April 1, 1928. All were buried by John V. May.

There are still descendants of Simon Cripe and his brothers living in the area as well as houses and commercial buildings standing as monuments to these enterprising pioneers.

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11.





**The inside of the key shop at 5369 W. Lawrence. Simon H. Cripe with his grandson Stanley Keck**

*Photo Courtesy of Leona Schmitt*



## Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village

By Dan Pogorzelski

Nestled between the stately Greystones of Logan Square and the weathered Victorians of Old Irving, Chicago's Avondale community area, is filled with some of the Northwest Side's most unique architecture with its characteristic mix of steeples, smokestacks and two-flats. While today Avondale is chiefly associated with the famous "Polish Village" along Milwaukee Avenue centered around **St. Hyacinth Basilica** and **St. Wenceslaus Church** in the district's western half, diverse ethnicities have contributed over time to the area's rich narrative.

Avondale's history begins as part of the quiet prairie area surrounding Chicago in what would be incorporated as **Jefferson Township** in 1850. Two of the old Native American trails through the area were planked, becoming the Upper and Lower Northwest Plank Roads, routes traversed largely by truck farmers en route to sell their goods at the Randolph Street Market. Known to us today as Milwaukee and Elston Avenues, these two diagonal thoroughfares break up the monotony of the city's ever-present grid.

The Upper Plank Road that became Milwaukee Avenue was particularly notorious. Full of warped and missing boards, it was the focus of local's ire because you had to pay for the shoddy ride down this way at one of the toll booths that Amos Snell, the road's owner had set up at regular intervals. One of these booths was located in what is now Avondale, where Milwaukee and Belmont Avenue intersect today, kitty corner to where the old **Congress Restaurant** was once located. After a clash with the city because of an attempt to toll the Fire Department, the tollgates themselves went up in flames and Snell himself was mysteriously murdered.

Avondale was first incorporated as a village in 1869. Although settlement in the area begins with the extension of the **Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific** tracks to Milwaukee in 1870 and the building of a post office at the corner of Belmont and Troy at a stop of the **Chicago & North Western Railway** in 1873, real development would wait until after Jefferson Township was annexed to the city in 1889. The city brought up the level of local infrastructure and even paved Milwaukee Avenue. Access to the city improved with the extension of the Milwaukee streetcar line to Jefferson Park and the building of the elevated train in neighboring Logan Square.



**The St. Hyacinth Basilica in 1930. The Church was designed by Worthmann and Steinbach who built many of Chicago's "Polish Cathedrals".**

*Photo Courtesy of St. Hyacinth Church*

14.

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**The photo shows a street scene in Avondale in 1908. Children are seen playing on the sidewalk on the west side of 3100 block of North Sawyer (near the intersection of Avondale, Sawyer, and Belmont). The houses are still standing.**



**The photo at the left is the front of the DeVry University building, 4131 W. Belmont, after the Bell & Howell Schools took it over. The building has now been converted to condos.**

16.



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All of these improvements resulted in Avondale’s rapid development as people poured in from the overpopulated districts closer to the city core. Within two decades, the population in Avondale had reached just over 38,000, and by 1930 it was considered to have achieved residential maturity. Much of the population was foreign-born, with Germans and Scandinavians predominating east of Kedzie while Poles represented the chief group west of it, with a smattering of Italians later entering the area later.

Poles, who have today become synonymous with Avondale, are recorded to have entered the area beginning in the 1890’s. Historian Edward Kantowicz maintains that Milwaukee Avenue’s role as the chief route between the old Polish Downtown and St. Adalbert’s Cemetery in Niles is the reason for the spread of Chicago’s Polish community along this street. Kantowicz cites the fact that the funeral processions down Milwaukee Avenue gave Polish immigrants to Chicago the opportunity to become well acquainted with the empty lots in its vicinity, giving rise to the city’s infamous “Polish Corridor”.

Coming from Bucktown and skipping over the German and Scandinavian dominated mansions along Logan Boulevard, Polish settlement of Avondale began in earnest. By 1894 St. Hyacinth’s Roman Catholic Parish was founded for Poles in an attempt to pre-empt the establishment of a schismatic parish by the Polish National Catholic Church. St. Hyacinth’s grew to be so large that another Polish church, St. Wenceslaus had to be built to serve the Polish community, in addition to a small mission church dedicated to **Our Lady of Fatima** at 3051 N. Christiana.



**A photo of a pastoral visit by Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, as the Archbishop of Cracow, at St. Hyacinth Basilica in Avondale.**

17.

*Photo Courtesy of St. Hyacinth Church*



Ironically enough, although Avondale today is most closely identified as the home of these two Polish houses of worship, the first church in the area was actually an African-American congregation. “**The Allen Church**” as it was known, was founded in the late 1880’s and located just north of Milwaukee Avenue in the vicinity of the current Belmont Blue Line ‘L’ station

Due to its proximity to both rail and the North Branch of the Chicago River, the area developed a wealth of industry that still survives in the city’s Pulaski Industrial Corridor. The now closed **Grebe’s Boatyard** was located along the river’s west bank north of Belmont Avenue. Situated right across from the old **Riverview Park**, the boatyard built not only luxury powered yachts for the rich but also manufactured minesweepers and other small naval vessels during World War II. There was even a section in Avondale along Belmont Avenue that came to be called “**Bricktown**” thanks to all the clay pits and brick factories all around it. Companies such as Florsheim Shoes, Olson Rug and the like had large factories located here producing goods that were shipped across the country.

It was adjacent to his own factory that Mr. Walter E. Olson built what the Chicago Tribune put at the top of its list of the “*Seven Lost Wonders of Chicago*”, the **Olson Park and Waterfall Complex**, a 22-acre garden and waterfall remembered by Chicagoans citywide as the place they fondly reminisce heading out to for family trips on the weekend. Today many of these same factories have been converted into chic loft residences as demand for this kind of housing escalates.



**Indian Chief Stands next to the main waterfall at Diversey and Pulaski. For more photos and information see *JPHS Newsletter January 2008 – Olson Waterfall***



**The Avondale Presbyterian Church at the northeast corner of Albany Avenue and School Street. The building was built in 1891.**

*Photo Courtesy of Frank Suerth*

**No longer an active church, the building is still standing today.**





The overall housing stock reflects the more modest livelihood of Avondale's residents relative to its upscale neighbors. Instead of the double lots common in Old Irving and the Villa District or the elegant mansions along Logan Boulevard we see rows of well-kept bungalows and two-flats typical of Chicago's "Bungalow Belt". Opulent architecture in Avondale is something that is found not in the home but in its temples. Case in point is **the Basilica of St. Hyacinth** with its characteristic three-towered façade that is surely one of the city's finest examples of the so-called "Polish Cathedral" style of architecture. With seating for over 2,000 people, stained glass windows imported from the workshop of **F.X. Zettler of Munich**, massive bronze doors cast by **Czeslaw Dzwigaj**, and its painted saucer dome measuring 3,000 square feet with over 150 figures, the church is sure to stir the soul. Nearby *St. Wenceslaus* impresses with a more daring architectural aesthetic and is considered to be "one of the best examples of the fusion of Art Deco stylings with medieval European architecture in the city of Chicago". The purgatorial shrine here was designed by famed artist **Jan Henryk De Rosen**, responsible for the famous frescoes of the Armenian Cathedral in L'viv, Ukraine, as well as prominent pieces in both the Anglican and Catholic Cathedrals in Washington DC.

St. Hyacinth Basilica anchors **Jackowo**, the Polish name for the "Polish Patch" that dominates over Avondale's west end. The ethnic neighborhood is usually clumped together under this name with the Polish district just north around St. Wenceslaus, or **Waclawowo**, as local Poles refer to it. Until the recent installation of an automated system on Sunday mornings, the CTA driver announced *Yats-koh-voh*, signaling the stop for St. Hyacinth Basilica as Poles shuttled off the bus on their way to mass. This is the area that became the nexus of Chicago's Polonia from the 1970's onward as Poles left Polonia Triangle and the historic Polish Downtown centered on Milwaukee, Division, and Ashland.

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The Polish Village saw its heyday through the 1980's during the **Solidarity** movement as martial law in Poland brought a flood of Polish refugees and immigrants. Demand for housing was so intense at one point that locals claim that rents were higher than even many of the most lavish areas of the city for a short time. Even today, the Polish Patch within Avondale actually spills out of the community area's boundaries so that Polish-themed neighborhood institutions such as the St. Joseph Home for the aged and Kosciuszko Park are actually just over the boundary in the northern reaches of Logan Square.

A distinct flowering of Polish arts and culture took place here in Avondale, an environment where Poles could finally freely express themselves without worrying about incurring the wrath of government censors or political repression. The events and activities organized here by Chicago's Polish community played a key role in shaping the chain of events that eventually resulted in the collapse of the Communist government in Poland, bringing down the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe since after World War II. A highly expressive and now unfortunately decaying mural in the McDonald's parking lot combining Polish patriotic and folkloric motifs stands forsaken near the corners of Belmont and Pulaski in mute testament to this bygone renaissance.

Avondale's connection to Chicago Polonia has brought the vicinity some notable visitors. Both Nobel Peace Prize winner and former President of Poland **Lech Walesa**, as well as former Premier **Jaroslaw Kaczynski** paid official visits through the area. Future **Pope John Paul II** trekked to St. Hyacinth's several times as the Archbishop of Cracow and referred to his gatherings there during his 1979 pilgrimage to Chicago. Avondale once served as the place for the political elites to publicly cavort for the support of the Polish American electorate with politicians both local and national visiting the district. No less a figure than former **President George H. W. Bush** attended mass at St. Hyacinth's as well as a meal at the former Orbit restaurant during his 1988 campaign. Purportedly violence almost broke out as supporters of Lyndon La Rouche protesting outside the basilica were not looked at very kindly by local Poles, who had a reverence for the candidate they saw as the best hope against the loathed Communist regime in Poland.

Today much of the Polish diaspora has moved out of Avondale to outlying neighborhoods while other immigrant groups from Latin America or from the former Soviet Bloc, such as Ukrainians, Belarusians and Czechs have moved in. The area however still retains much of its Polish character, with Polish bakeries, restaurants, businesses and even a department store visible in its landscape. Like neighboring Logan Square, the neighborhood is also experiencing gentrification as artists and Yuppies like the Poles and Latinos before them, move their way northwest along Milwaukee Avenue. As in other Chicago neighborhoods, change is sure to be the one constant in Avondale's history.

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## Mystery Photo

Photo Courtesy of Gail Weber



Who are these people and what are they doing all dressed up and sitting on a front porch? We do not know who they are or why they are in their Sunday best. This is what we do know: John Groenier took the photo sometime around 1910 and it was taken somewhere in Jefferson Park. On the glass negative, he wrote "Masonic". This photo was taken before the Masonic Temple was built on Gale Street. The Masons did meet in the Jefferson Park many years before their Gale Street Temple was built. Maybe this house was located where the Masonic Temple now stands.

Please contact the NWCHS if you have any thoughts at all on the location of this house or the identification of these people. Email us at: [nwchicagohistory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nwchicagohistory@sbcglobal.net)

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