



Northwest Chicago Historical Society

Your Neighborhood Historical Society

Newsletter July 2020

Number XXXII

**A History of Segregation on the Northwest Side
The Ghost Train • Polish Catholic Parishes in Chicago**



#BLM

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 We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications.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



1909 photo of the Irving Park School located at what is now 3829 N. Kedvale Ave.

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Membership:

\$15.00 per calendar year

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About This Issue...

For many of us, 2020 will prove to be one of the most momentous years of our life. We are currently in the middle of a global pandemic (Coronavirus Disease 2019, or COVID-19), with already almost a million of lives lost around the world. We have lost friends, family members, and neighbors. In the Chicago area, some of the first lives lost were on the Northwest Side. While wearing masks and 'social distancing' are temporary precautions, our lives will be forever altered. The pandemic has also caused a financial collapse, as everyone is relegated to their homes and activities and events have been cancelled. It may take us a decade or more to recover.

More than 100 years ago, in 1918, we were also in the middle of a global pandemic. Over a third of the planet was infected, and more than 50 million people died. As Chicago was not immune, we initially wanted to write about what happened in that era. Chicago had mandatory mask rules and instituted large fines for coughing or spitting in public. We also had a horrible death toll.

Then, on May 25th of this year, something earth-shattering happened. George Floyd, an African American man, was killed during an arrest in Minneapolis. The charge? Passing along a counterfeit \$20 bill. His death sparked a public outcry over social injustice, and millions of people took to the streets globally. "Black Lives Matter" became a mainstream expression, as we acknowledge how we have historically denied social, political, and economic power to Black Americans. Hundreds of organizations, businesses, and governmental entities stand by these sentiments. According to the New York Times, it is the largest social movement in the history of the nation.

Because of this historic movement, we wanted to bring our readers attention to issues of race and segregation on the Northwest Side. "Segregation on the Northwest Side" is broad overview of our history here, with special attention paid to certain notable events. It will help people understand the reason that our city is so segregated and why the Northwest Side is not diverse as it would have been under more equitable circumstances.

"The Ghost Train" is a tale of a train that was intended to run through the Northwest side, from Franklin Park to Mayfair (much of the track was down what would later become Sunnyside Avenue.) For a myriad of reasons, the track was laid but no train ever traveled along the tracks. We can still find remnants of this unused line today.

Also enjoy our interview with Professor Edward R. Kantowicz on Polish Roman Catholic Parishes.

Thank you for taking the time to understand more about our past. Stay safe, and keep making history.

- Susanna Ernst

Letters

Letters may have been edited for clarity and space

Although I always enjoy the newsletter this issue (NWCHS Jan 2020) was special for me. All of us who no longer live in Chicago but grew up there, are always CHICAGOANS where ever we live and for those of us who lived in Jefferson Park “Jeff” is always HOME. I lived at 5216 Lieb Avenue and later my family with sons Robin and Kurt also lived there.

Milwaukee Avenue and the intersection with Central, Foster and Northwest Highway was the central and up Milwaukee Avenue and Higgins to Lawrence was the place we learned to shop or window shop and learned comparison shopping. In the 30’s and 40’s my sister Joann, and I would say we were “going up the Ave” it was that center we meant.

Names mentioned in your stories bring back images of that wonderful time and the places that were important to us. Now we were right at the heart of shopping. From Gale Street we’d pass on the east side, a car dealer, a big hardware store with bikes and trikes as well as tools in the windows. Close by there was The Candy Pail and an Andes Candy store by the Times an art deco movie theater. Then the store with the marvelous electric eye door opener: The A&P grocery store. Close by was Beenar’s dress shop they even had price tags by the window display dresses so we’d know how much we needed to save.

When we crossed Argyle Street there was a big Woolworth’s Dime Store a favorite with jewelry and school supplies a lunch counter and even fish for an aquarium. Next Wolke and Kotler a two story department store a shoe store on the corner and just around the corner a milliner’s shop where you could try on hats even when they knew you had no money to buy!

Next Fanny Mae and looking down Lawrence was the movie palace The Gateway. How many wonderful Saturday afternoons we spent there. Crossing Lawrence Avenue there was a jewelry store on the corner another favorite Kresge’s Dime Store, close by The Ideal Bakery with wonderful inches high cheesecake. There were other stores but usually we crossed Milwaukee and walked back past the Jeff movie theater, Fleischman’s Liquor store and Bright meat market where things were cut to order not all packaged ahead then on the corner was a large Walgreen’s. A glance west on Lawrence we could see Western Savings and Loan, across the Street was The Golden Slipper shoe repair and The Valet cleaners.

On the corner was a men’s wear with fancy ties and fedora’s on display. Then Borman’s shoe store with an xray machine to see how shoes fit. Close by was Annes Department store like Wolke and Kotler a two story department store, memory says they had a beauty shop on a mezzanine and sold, many lovely silk stockings. By now we were at the angled corner shown in the story Higgins and Milwaukee.

The fruit store on the corner as next door to an Army Nany surplus store and the Knobe’s Stationary the treasure chest of Nancy Drew Mystery books for 50 cents each. If we wanted to, we could go to the park and the field house where there was a gym for games and taking election lessons. So many wonderful memories of a great place to grow up!

As I said Always a Chicagoan and Jeff always home Many thanks for all the issues of the Newsletter.

Dolores Sherman Weeda - NWCHS Member - Wyoming, MN

Letters

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Hello,

I am working on finishing a film about Lee Godie (leegodiemovie.com) and wondered if you had photos that might able to be used in the film, as she grew up in 4255 N Narragansett, across the street from Dunning (about years 1917 - 1935) and recently ran across a dnainfo article that showed some photos.

Look forward to hearing from someone,

Kapra Fleming - Chicago, IL



The photo above is of the intersection of Narragansett and Irving Park Road, looking west on Irving. The Dunning hospital entrance is on the right. This intersection is just a few blocks south of Lee Godie’s girlhood home.

Note: Lee Godie was an artist who lived and sold her artwork on the streets of Chicago. For more info on the film: www.leegodiemovie.com - NWCHS

Polish Catholic Parishes in Chicago

The following is an interview with Professor Edward R. Kantowicz by Daniel Pogorzelski on Polish Roman Catholic Parishes in Chicago

1) Tell us who you are. When did your family come to the United States?

I was born and raised in Chicago. My grandfather came to the U.S. from Russian Poland around 1900 and then brought over his wife and their first child a few years later. They had six more children, including my father, born in Chicago. Family legend says my grandfather was a deserter from the Russian Army. This may be true. Young men in pre-Revolutionary Russia, Poles most of all, had plenty of reasons to avoid the Tsar's Army. This could explain why I have been a lifelong pacifist and conscientious objector. My mother's family came from Austrian Poland about the same time. My paternal grandfather settled in Bridgeport and worked in the stockyards all his life. My mother grew up in Roseland. My sister and I did not grow up in Polish parishes. We were also the first in our family to pursue higher education.

I received a Ph.D in history from the University of Chicago in 1972. I was a professor of history at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada from 1969 to 1983. My wife then offered to support me in the style I was accustomed to if we would return to Chicago. I took her up on the offer and have since then worked as a free-lance writer and historical consultant. In that capacity I wrote a corporate history for the True Value Hardware Co. and a history of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Depending on how I feel when I get up in the morning I tell people either that I'm free-lancing, retired, or unemployed. I was probably better prepared for the current pandemic restrictions than most people, since I have been working from home for many years. My major publications are:

Polish-American Politics in Chicago: 1888-1940

Corporation Sole: Cardinal Mundelein and Chicago Catholicism

The Rage of Nations (Vol. 1 of A History of the 20th Century)

Coming Apart, Coming Together (Vol. 2 of A History of the 20th Century)

The Archdiocese of Chicago: A Journey of Faith.

2) Why did you decide to become a historian?

I have been interested in history as long as I can remember. I devoured books of history as a child. Though I originally studied for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Chicago, there was no question in my mind what to do when I decided to leave the seminary. I immediately started studying history at the University of Chicago.

3) Tell us about the history of Poles and Polish Parishes in the archdiocese of Chicago.

Roman Catholic parishes in Chicago, as elsewhere, were primarily territorial. One worshipped near where one lived. The Archdiocese of Chicago followed an informal policy, early in the 20th century, of building one parish per square mile in the city. This can be easily plotted on a map, even today. There was, however, a very large exception to this rule. Non-English speaking ethnic groups, such as the Poles, were granted permission to build ethnic parishes, alongside and in addition to the territorial parishes. This greatly complicated the map, with six, seven, or eight Catholic parishes close together in some square mile areas of the city.

6.

Of course, the Mass and Sacraments were performed in a language equally incomprehensible to all ethnic groups (Latin). But the sermons, religious instructions, and social events took place in the vernacular, so it was vital that people could find a parish where their mother tongue was spoken. Early bishops and archbishops of Chicago encouraged or at least tolerated a proliferation of ethnic parishes. Archbishop James Edward Quigley (1903-1915) was particularly determined to leave no ethnic group, however small, wandering around looking for a church. He even inaugurated a parish, St. John Berchmans, for the very small Belgian group. His administration was described as "one long, ethnic peace treaty." As a result, in 1916, the city of Chicago counted 93 territorial parishes (which were primarily Irish), but also 35 German parishes, 34 Polish parishes, 9 Bohemian (Czech) parishes, 7 Slovak parishes, 9 Lithuanian parishes, and 11 Italian parishes.

Sociologists William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, in their 1919 classic study, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, characterized the Polish American parish as a re-creation of the Polish peasant village. It was that, indeed, and even more. Polish parishes were linked in an informal and unofficial "Polish league" which included not just churches, but schools, hospitals, orphanages and cemeteries. This Polish league functioned as a sub-diocese, almost as a separate denomination. Polish-American families, such as my grandparents, lived their entire lives within the Polish parish and league. My grandmother never needed to learn English; my uncle who was ordained a priest in 1940, spent his entire priestly career in Polish parishes.

4) Are there any overlooked figures who you think played an important role in the development of Chicago's Roman Catholic Parishes?

The major figures who are usually credited with founding and shaping the Polish league of Chicago parishes are the two Resurrectionists -- Vincent Barzynski and Francis Gordon -- and the diocesan priest, Paul Rhode. Barzynski was the founding pastor of Chicago's first Polish parish, St. Stanislaus Kostka, and Gordon was the builder of the monumental domed church of St. Mary of the Angels. Paul Rhode was the first Polish priest in America to be named a bishop -- first as an auxiliary bishop of Chicago, then as bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin.

There was another, often overlooked, Chicago priest who was just as important, if not more so, than those three. Msgr. Thomas Bona, longtime pastor of St. Mary of Perpetual Help parish in Bridgeport, served as representative of and spokesman for the Polish parishes in the archbishop's councils for about 30 years from 1920 until his death in 1950. His brother, Stanislaus Bona, also served as a priest of the archdiocese, and was eventually named bishop of Grand Island, Nebraska. Though Thomas Bona never wore a mitre, he had more power, influence, and authority than most bishops. He was the undisputed "boss" of Chicago's Polish league.

5) How does the development of the network of Polish Roman Catholic Parishes compare to other ethnic groups in the Archdiocese of Chicago, such as the Irish, Germans, Czechs, Italians, and others?

As the figures cited above for 1916 show, the Polish league of parishes was not unique. The Germans founded about the same number of parishes and were just as dedicated to preserving their language and culture as the Poles. Italians were less interested in the institutions of parish and school than the Germans and Poles were; the Bohemians were divided between fervent Catholics and a large "free-thinking", unchurched and anticlerical faction. Slovaks and Lithuanians were similar to the Poles and Germans in their adherence to ethnic parishes, but had much smaller numbers in Chicago. The Irish, of course, as English-speakers, simply treated the territorial parishes as their own.

7.

6) Tell us about some of the major conflicts between the Polish Roman Catholic Parishes and the Archdiocese.

The ethnic peace treaty of Archbishop Quigley's administration ended with his death. All things German became "verboten" during the two world wars and German-Americans moved swiftly towards assimilation. Poles retained their language and culture in their parishes much longer, but they fought a number of cultural battles with Quigley's successor, Archbishop George William (Cardinal) Mundelein (1916-1939). Mundelein was a shrewd financial administrator who centralized and professionalized many institutions of the Chicago Archdiocese. He was also a dedicated Americanizer and assimilationist who discouraged the founding of new ethnic parishes. When he decreed that most of the subjects in Catholic schools should be taught only in English, this brought him into conflict with the Polish priests and parishioners of the city. He also tried to distribute newly-ordained Polish priests to non-Polish parishes. Poles are a stubborn people and they pushed back against the archbishop. Since a number of Polish parishes, both in Chicago and elsewhere, had already broken away from Rome and formed a separate, schismatic Polish National Church, Mundelein realized that the Poles weren't bluffing. He backed down on most of his Americanizing decrees and virtually conceded control of the Polish league to Msgr. Bona. Though few new ethnic parishes were officially instituted, many parishes in newer parts of the city had overwhelmingly Polish populations so they became Polish parishes in all but name, just as the territorial parishes were unofficially Irish.

7) What was the impact of Pope John Paul II's visit time Chicago in 1979?

The 37 hours which Pope St. John Paul II spent in Chicago during his 7-day American tour in October, 1979, left an indelible impression on all Chicagoans. They lined the streets to catch a glimpse of his motorcades and over 50,000 people celebrated his Mass at Five Holy Martyrs church, either inside or out on the parking lot. Then at least a million Chicagoans -- Polish and non-Polish, Catholic and non-Catholic -- attended the outdoor Mass in Chicago's front yard of Grant Park on the afternoon of October 5, 1979. I was sick that day and could not attend, but my wife and two small children were there. They were overwhelmed by the friendliness of the crowd and reported that at one point an African-American man hoisted one of my sons to his shoulders so that he could see better. Anyone who lived in Chicago was proud that day -- but Poles most of all.

Edward R. Kantowicz is Professor Emeritus of History at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. In 2018, Professor Kantowicz wrote the introduction to the history book on the Chicago neighborhood of Logan Square from the Images of America Series by Arcadia Publishing. Professor Kantowicz has lived in the Logan Square just south of the Jackowo area for two decades.

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The Ghost Train of the Northwest Side

By Susanna Ernst

The roads on Northwest Side were once dirt tracks used by horse teams. Years later, they would be paved and used by motor vehicles. However, some of our local residential streets were dominated by another type of road - the railroad.

In the late 1800's, the *Chicago, Hammond and Western Railroad* purchased the right-of-way for a 6-mile "inner belt line" that would lead from Franklin Park to the Mayfair Station (just southeast of Cicero and Montrose.) The intent was to connect railroad lines, as it would join the *Milwaukee and St. Paul* to the *Chicago and Northwestern* as well as the *Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul*. The land acquired was a sixty-six foot wide swath that ran from Franklin Park as far north as the "Dunning Asylum" (located near Wright College), followed the Indian Boundary Line (now Forest Preserve Drive), and then ran east in the empty prairie that would eventually become Sunnyside Avenue. The right-of-way turned south at the point where Long Avenue would cross Sunnyside, and then headed southeast until it intersected Cullom at Laramie, and then due east to the Mayfair station (see map on pages 14 & 15).

By 1898, most of the property had been secured with no opposition. According to newspaper sources, the price paid to landowners was significant so as not to halt the project. At that time, the railroad was hoping that the project would commence within the year. Unfortunately, it didn't happen the way that they had hoped. The *Chicago, Hammond, and Western Railway* ran into financial trouble, and they were acquired by the *Chicago Terminal Transfer Railroad*. (CTTRR) The CTTRR was to acquire and manage a large line that ran downtown and around the city of Chicago, including Franklin Park (where the Mayfair extension would connect.) They fully intended on continuing the project and in 1899 indicated that they wanted to complete the project quickly.

As often happened in the city of Chicago, the process to get the tracks built was slower than the CTTRR had anticipated. They were able to complete the suburban portion of the track, but they had some difficulty getting the Chicago portion started due to arguments with the city over track elevation. By late 1898, the tracks ran from Franklin Park toward the city, but they stopped at Austin Avenue. The CTTRR was debating with the city over the logistics of the track construction. In July of 1900, the city agreed the track could be laid, but the rails must be elevated and "subways" must be built under major thoroughfares. The area was becoming more populated, and they wanted to ensure that traffic would not be impeded and children would be not be endangered walking to school. The City's ordinance indicated that CTTRR must start work on the elevation by September of 1900 and have the elevation complete by July of 1901. The CTTRR went ahead with track construction, but only at ground level.

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Much to the chagrin of the City and local residents, the CTTRR dithered, and did not elevate the tracks by July of 1901. In late 1902, the city of Chicago was frustrated, so they repealed the ordinance giving the CTTRR the rights to operate their railroad. The city charged that the company was not operating the road, and it had not been elevated as they had been instructed through ordinance. In early 1903, the city laid out an ultimatum. The CTTRR was instructed to comply with their original ordinance and to start the work within 20 days. If they did not, the tracks would be removed by the city at CTTRR's expense. Once again, the CTTRR did not adhere to the ordinance, much to the frustration of the city and the local aldermen.

Before 1923, every Ward had two aldermen. Alderman Butler was one of the aldermen of the 27th Ward, which encompassed the entire Northwest Side. The 27th Ward was a wide swath of land, covering most of the land northwest of North Avenue and Western Avenue, all the way to the city limits. While Alderman Butler and his co-alderman managed a wide territory, the situation with the CTTRR incensed him. He was quite the character in City Hall, known for his frequent outbursts and theatrics - the local newspapers reveled in covering his fiery behavior. By July of 1903, Alderman Butler was insisting on the passage of an order directing the commissioner of public works tear up the CTTRR's tracks in his Ward. Either that, or he wanted another franchise to operate the road. The council committee recommended taking away the rights of the CTTRR. As might be suspected, the CTTRR filed an application for an injunction to restrain the city from tearing up the tracks and a U.S. attorney upheld the injunction.



Two concrete pylons on each side of the Des Plaines River just south of the Belmont Avenue bridge once supported the Chicago Terminal Transfer Railroad Company's train trestle.
12. *Photo by Frank Suerth*



These concrete pylons on each side of the Des Plaines River are all that remains of the Chicago Terminal Transfer Railroad Company's train tracks that ran from Franklin Park to the Mayfair. All other physical evidence has vanished and faded into history.

Photo by Frank Suerth

The CTTRR asked for a revision of the elevation ordinance, and in 1906 that new ordinance was passed. The weary city and Alderman Butler redrafted, revised, and extended the ordinance, with very explicit instructions about the locations of the of subways. Their aggravation was to come at a cost to the railroad - their revisions were going to cost them twice the amount of the elevation ordinance of 1900. As suspected, the CTTRR once again did not comply.

As often happened with the plethora of railway companies throughout that era, the CTTRR was ultimately absorbed by another Railroad company. The Baltimore and Ohio Railway Company acquired the rails in early 1910. According to the mid-century Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, the railway line from Franklin Park to Mayfair was never even actually connected to the tracks at Franklin Park or Mayfair; the line never operated. The rail line was torn up shortly after that, and completely abandoned in 1916. Never had the area seen so much drama over something of such little consequence.

Where can we see evidence of the CTTRR today?

Most of the remnants of this old rail line are gone; it is impossible to see (and almost impossible to imagine) where the tracks ran down Sunnyside and Cullom and where they crossed over what is now residential property on Long, Lockwood, Agatite, Pensacola, Laramie, and Montrose. Today, it is a sea of homes built on typical Chicago size lots, mostly during the 1920's. Some people have speculated that the wide width of Sunnyside west of Milwaukee is due to the CTTRR. While it's definitely plausible, it is not certain. The CTTRR rails did not exist between Long and Milwaukee, leaving a large swath of Sunnyside inexplicably wide. Additionally, when the tracks were built, the land was completely undeveloped - there was no road there. The CTTRR also ran down Cullom (also with no trace today), and that street is as narrow as other Chicago streets. The ordinances to widen Sunnyside were passed in the late 1910's, but widening did not occur until the mid-1920's - long after the railroad was abandoned and possibly even forgotten.

Just outside of Franklin Park, Belmont Avenue crosses the Des Plaines River, remnants of the bridge for the CTTRR still exist. Hidden behind the trees at the riverbank are dilapidated pillars that once held up the train trestle that crossed the river. They are difficult to see from the road; they sit just south of Belmont Avenue, immediately west of St. Joseph Cemetery in River Grove.

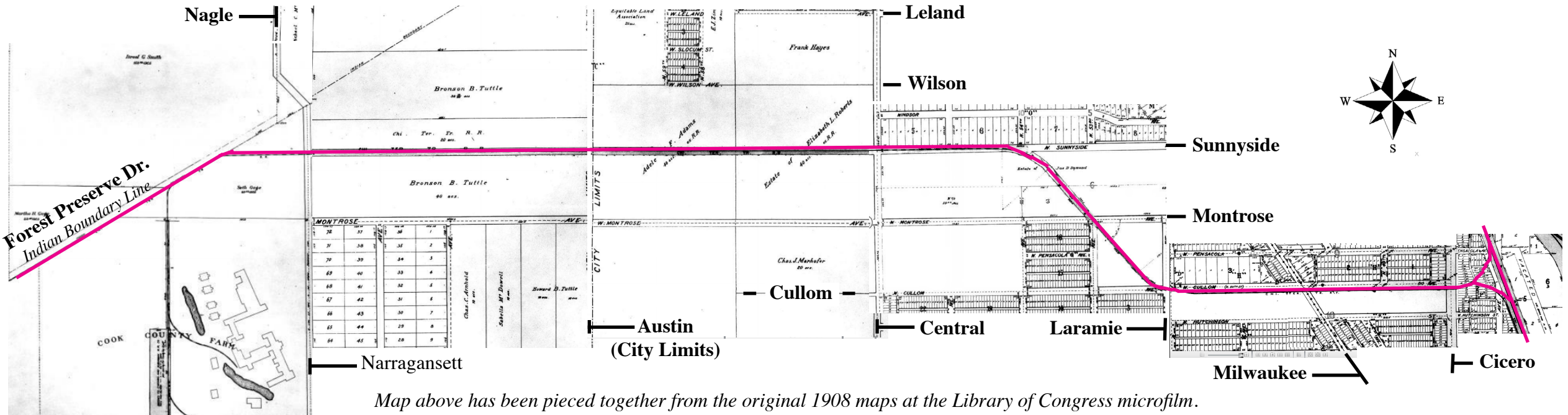
One other site exists that cannot be definitively tied to the railroad, but is a likely candidate. It is the small and unusually shaped fast food stand at Addison and Forest Preserve Drive. It was clearly not built as a residential building, with its low slung roof and triangular shape. County records indicate that this little building was constructed around 1900. While the age is not unusual, maps from the area indicate that there were no roads here at the time - this was undeveloped land. The only nearby "road" would be the one that ran right in front of it from 1900-1910: the railroad for the CTTRR.



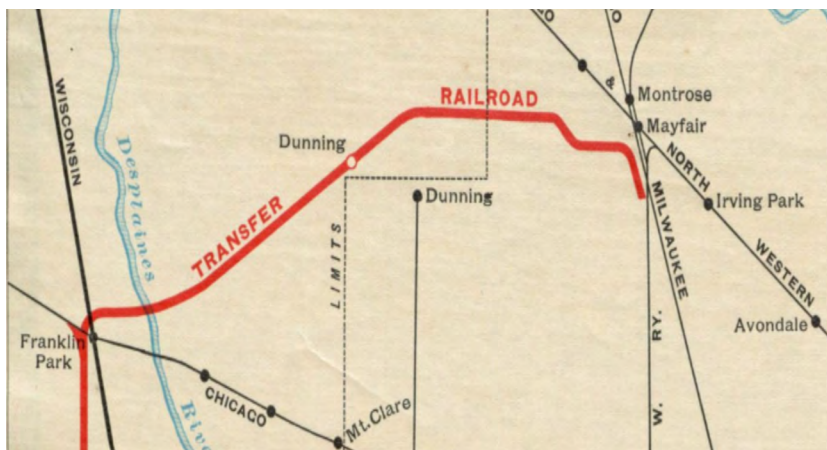
Train stop for the CTTRR?

Photo by Frank Suerth

Chicago Terminal Transfer Railroad Company, route Franklin Park to Mayfair (eastern section)



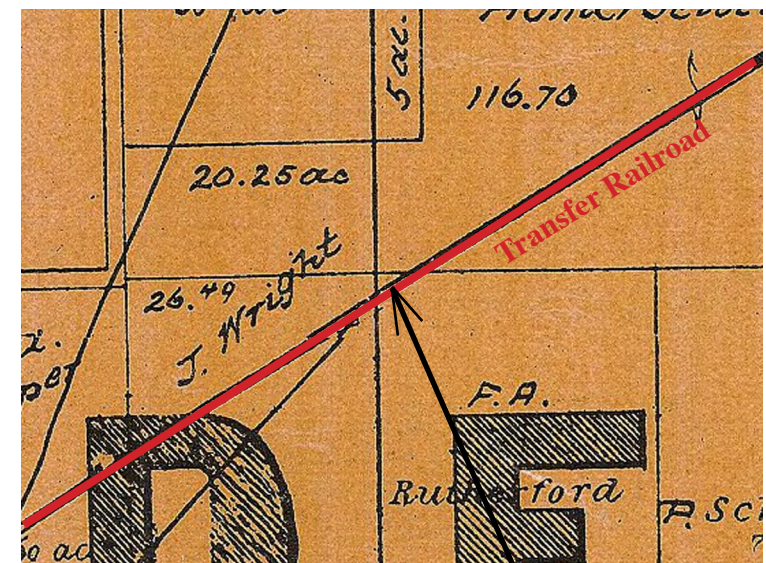
Map above has been pieced together from the original 1908 maps at the Library of Congress microfilm.



This partial 1898 map of the Chicago Terminal Transfer Railroad Company shows its northern most route. The long gone railroad company had tracks as far south as Chicago Heights and east into Indiana. Map from the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library.

The composite map above shows the location of the tracks for the CTRR spur line that ran from Franklin Park to the Mayfair station. Note that the map indicates that the tracks would also potentially connect to existing tracks at the County Farm (Infirmary) at Dunning. At the time, most of this area was undeveloped and had not yet been subdivided into city lots.

The map at the right shows the small, triangular parcel where a small building was constructed in 1900. (It is now a fast food stand - see picture on page 13). With no roads and very few people living in the area at the time, the original use for the building could have been tied to the railroad. The CTRR rail line runs along the Indian Boundary Line (the future Forest Preserve Drive) and borders the south end of this parcel. Years later, Addison would be built directly to the north and Pacific Avenue directly to the west. Pacific Avenue is 8000 west, and exactly a mile west of Harlem Avenue. Chicago's standard grid conventions, with major arterial streets every mile, would have normally dictated that Pacific would be a major street. It is not a major road today, but it is unknown if that played any role in the location of the building.



Location of triangle property
Map from the Mitchells Real Estate Map of Chicago & Suburbs 1903

A History of Segregation on the Northwest Side

Our past and the legacy we leave for future residents

By Susanna Ernst

In August of 1966, civil rights activists peacefully marched through Jefferson Park to protest housing segregation. These marches were part of the broader Freedom movement, orchestrated in Chicago by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Multiple real estate agents in the Jefferson Park area had turned away financially qualified black applicants, and then they assisted white applicants who were less financially qualified. The protesters wanted to bring this to the attention of the city and the nation. On that hot August day, 350 marchers were heckled by hundreds of bystanders, and they had to dodge rocks, bottles, and other debris.

Fifty-four years later, in June of 2020, peaceful marches were again staged in Jefferson Park. As before, they were protesting the injustices suffered by de facto segregation in the neighborhood, the city, and throughout the nation. These peaceful marchers were part of “Black Lives Matter” movement, which was sweeping the country and the globe. These marches, though, were different from the marches of 1966. This time, hecklers did not appear, and bystanders were not throwing objects into the crowd. Additionally, the number of protesters was far greater; almost three times as many participated. Most importantly, though, these people were mostly residents. This part of Chicago is experiencing a metamorphosis, and the community is going through a renaissance in the new century.



Residents and supporters march peacefully down Milwaukee Avenue in Jefferson Park as part of the “Black Lives Matter” movement.

Photo Courtesy of Nadig Newspapers – Photo taken by William Swanson

European and Black Settlement on the Northwest Side – 1830-1920

To understand where we are today, we must look back in history. After the US Government had forcibly removed Native Americans from Illinois in the 1830’s, European settlers started arriving in the area. By the 1860’s, the area was comprised of several villages (Jefferson, Irving Park, Norwood) outside the city of Chicago, settled predominantly by people of white European descent. When these villages and others were annexed to the city in 1889, some small black enclaves existed (most notably in Avondale). However, black residents of the area eventually moved to other parts of the city and were mostly non-existent on the Northwest Side by 1920.

African Americans did not start coming to Chicago en masse until the beginning of the Great Migration, right before the first World War (~1916). The Great Migration was a period when millions of African Americans migrated from the south to the north, often in pursuit of manufacturing jobs that were becoming more available in the northern industrial cities. At the same time, European immigrants were also arriving in droves, and competition for jobs and good wages was stiff. This often resulted in resentment among current residents, new European immigrants, and African Americans. Animosity and hostility between the European immigrants and African Americans are possible reasons for the disappearance of black enclaves on the Northwest Side, with many lifelong black residents moving away to the crowded Black Belt south of the Loop.

Restrictive Covenants and Discriminatory Housing Practices – 1920-1980

By 1920, many residents of the Northwest Side (and all over the city) wanted to ensure that they would not have to ever live near African Americans. To do this, property owners established racially restrictive covenants on their property or their block. These covenants were tied to property deeds or plat maps, and they legally prohibited an owner from selling to a specific minority group. These contracts constrained the freedoms of the signer and all future property owners to sell to whomever they chose. If an owner ignored the restriction, they could be sued and held financially liable. Entire neighborhoods were restricting the sales of homes to African Americans by the mid 1920’s, and this continued for decades. Language written by the Chicago Real Estate Board (now called Chicago Association of Realtors) shows a widespread use of racial restrictions and zoning for nonresidential purposes to restrict the African American residential districts. Many of these restrictive covenants existed around Oriole Park, Shabonna Park, Merrimac Park, and Edgebrook, and some did not expire until as late as 1980.

In 1933, the Homeowner’s Loan Corporation (HLC) was established. For the prior 14 years, the federal government had been trying to encourage people to own homes with slogans such as “It’s the patriotic thing to do!” The HLC program would purchase existing home mortgages that were about to go into foreclosure. They would then issue new mortgages, with low interest, to be paid out over 15 years and amortized. The risk assessment on the mortgages was conducted by local real estate agents who made appraisals.

The following year, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established, issuing bank mortgages and covering 80% of the cost. However, before they would do this, they needed to ensure that a home was a suitable risk. The FHA allowed the HLC to create what were called “residential security maps,” outlining the level of security for many cities in the US, including Chicago. These maps were colorized in green, blue, yellow, and red, with green being an excellent risk and a good candidate for a mortgage, while neighborhoods in red were of the highest risk and not recommended for a guaranteed mortgage. Neighborhoods that had minorities living in them were generally colorized red, due to the “quality of the inhabitants.” This is what is what we know today as “redlining.” Lack of loans for buying these properties or making repairs made it difficult for these neighborhoods to attract and keep residents. Many urban historians point to this federal legislation as one of the main reasons for the overall decline of urban areas in the middle of the 20th century.

The 1935 FHA Underwriting Manual indicated that to be a good risk for a loan, “properties must be occupied by same social and racial classes.” The FHA discouraged banks from loaning in urban areas, as they had older buildings and would be quick to transition to a “lower class occupancy.” The FHA also promoted school segregation, as they felt areas would be unstable if they were racially incompatible. This continued into the 1940’s, but the racial language was removed in 1947. In 1952, the language was altered to read, “requires compatibility among neighborhood occupants.”

Throughout the middle of the century, these regulations caused even more overcrowding in already dense neighborhoods, and crime became more prevalent as police officers were reluctant to patrol some of these areas. At the time, there were not the same types of protocols for policing we have today, and many of them preferred to ensure peace in neighborhoods where their families and important politicians lived.

Real estate brokers were able to capitalize on people’s fears: they would convince communities that black people moving into their neighborhood would cause their home values to plummet. People would frantically sell their homes to these brokers, who would then turn around and sell them at inflated rates to African Americans (there was a lack of housing available to them, so they had to pay these rates if they wanted to own the home.) The Federal government would generally not guarantee their loans, so they would not gain any equity – if they missed a payment or tried to move elsewhere, they were left on the street with nothing to show for their investments. They often would work around the clock to pay their mortgages, leaving little time for family or upkeep on the home. As neighborhoods became predominantly African American, they became classified as “high risk” areas. Home values would then start to decline, leaving broken communities with subpar city services and little to show for their investments.

Racial Tension & Civil Rights Marches – 1960-1968

By 1963, as Northwest Side residents witnessed this, many people panicked. They were worried about what was going to ultimately happen to their neighborhoods. Not all homes and communities had restrictive covenants, so there was concern that the situation on the Northwest side would mirror what was happening on the south and west sides. At the time, the racial tension grew so high that Alderman Fifielski of the 45th Ward gathered church leaders in the area to develop a plan for harmony and to calm residents. He gathered 40 members of the clergy from 15 different churches in the area to spearhead an educational program. Key churches included the Congregational Church of Jefferson Park, St. Cornelius, Portage Park Presbyterian, and the Jefferson Park Lutheran Church. The alderman was concerned about the level of prejudice in the area, and he wanted to allay fears that the area would “become a slum if a Negro or Puerto Rican family moved in.” He wanted members of the clergy to provide leadership. “We must be forward thinking to realize it’s coming.”

In 1966, the Civil Rights movement had gained a great deal of impetus, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Chicago to work for peaceful reform. During this time, marches were held throughout the city, including Jefferson Park. Potential black residents were shut out by multiple realties on the Northwest Side; they were told that there was no property available in the area. When white people made inquiries, they were shown properties immediately. 350 people marched through the streets and protested in front of realtors’ offices over two days that August.

Busing on the Northwest Side 1968

As the black community continued to be shut out of most neighborhoods due to racial covenants and inability to obtain mortgages, their communities and schools had become severely overcrowded. In the meantime, schools in other areas, such as the Northwest Side, did not have completely full classrooms. Hundreds of children on the Northwest Side attended parochial schools, so the public schools were not completely at capacity. To remedy the situation, in 1968, the Chicago School Board planned to bus children from the Austin neighborhood to multiple Northwest Side Schools, including Thorp, Bridge, Smyser, Sayre, Dever, Burbank, Lyon, and Locke. While parents of Austin students were strongly in favor of this plan, Northwest side parents were not. When the School Board scheduled a hearing, parents on the Northwest Side erupted. Over 1500 people attended a School Board Meeting in February of 1968, mostly to protest this arrangement.

As the School Board came closer to voting on the issue, over 35 community groups gathered to form the Organization of Northwest Side Communities to collaborate on ways to stymie the busing plan. The Greater Northwest Civic Association, which was formed purely to fight the busing plan, took the helm of the movement. They encouraged several hundred people to go to Springfield to fight the issue. With the other groups, they collaboratively organized a boycott of the schools. When the boycott started, on March 4, 1968, 75% of the students of 9 schools on the Northwest Side stayed at home. The boycott was halted later that week when the Chicago Park District forbade the parents and students from conducting rudimentary classrooms in Field Houses.

While the busing plan was voluntary and ‘one-way,’ community groups continued to collaborate to find ways to protest it. The Greater Northwest Civic Association suggested formulating a plan for the Northwest Side to secede from Chicago. At one assembly of the Organization of Northwest Communities, a resolution was introduced to have an I.Q. test administered to all children being bused. At another meeting, a state representative had implored parents at an earlier meeting “not to make this a racial battle,” which evoked a retort from those in attendance, “But it is!” The editor of the Northwest Times observed: “Anyone who doubts that the main busing opposition has its roots in racism need only have attended one of the citizens’ organizational meetings held on the Northwest Side during the past 10 days.”

Steve Telow, president of the Kilbourn Organization, suggested that Catholic School students on the Northwest Side switch to public schools, thus overcrowding them and “sabotaging” the School Board’s plan to move children to less crowded schools. The Greater Northwest Civic Association, the Northwest Taxpayers Council, and the Concerned Catholic Parishioners supported this plan, along with succession. The associate superintendent for Catholic Schools, Rev. H. Robert Clark, disagreed with the plans and found them “scandalous.”

On March 11, 1968, crowds gathered around Northwest Side schools to watch 250 frightened-looking children disembark from buses to enter their new schools. While some residents expressed empathy for the children, some jeered and hurled insults. A woman at Dever, identified as Mary Smith, said: “This is only the beginning. ... as soon as their kids start coming to our schools, they’ll want to move to our neighborhood!” Parents of children from the Austin neighborhood were apprehensive, but hopeful. Many of them spoke of their fears, but also their desire for educational opportunities that were simply not available in their current, severely overcrowded schools.

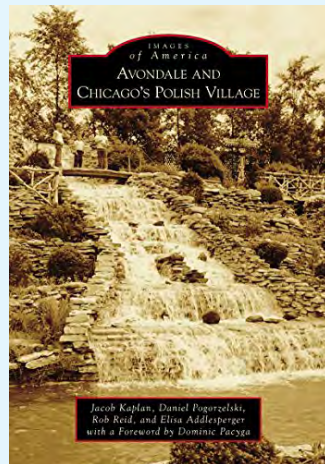


Anti-busing demonstration on the northwest side. Photo Courtesy of Nadig Newspapers

THANK YOU!

Historian and author Dan Pogorzelski for talking at our January meeting with a PowerPoint Program “Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village”

If you missed this meeting or want to learn more about it, please purchase his book: “Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village”



The coalition of Northwest Side community groups continued to meet to formulate a plan to end the busing. Later that March, they held a “Grievance Parade,” driving through streets and shopping areas to promote their anti-busing message. The Polish Homeowners and Taxpayers Association started picketing at the schools where the bused children were attending. Some of the other groups joined in, but not all of them agreed that this method would be effective. While several people were arrested, the most notorious arrests happened at Bridge School in April of 1968 in the aftermath of Martin Luther King Jr.’s death. Two residents, including Steve Telow, president of the Polish Homeowners Association, repeatedly raised the flag from its half-staff position to honor the memory of Dr. King. Telow insisted that Bridge is “..an American School. People have the right to raise the flag to full staff.”

Some organizations continued to boycott and picket during the rest of 1968, but by the spring of 1969, most parents had started to accept the busing program. Their worries about crime, graft, and reduction of educational quality had not been borne out. The public schools of the Northwest Side only lost 17 white pupils to private or suburban schools.

The Chicago Housing Authority and the Northwest Side – 1970-1983

By 1970, academics, urbanists, and city planners had started reevaluating the current situation with public housing. They realized that concentrating the poor in high-rise multi-building facilities, such as Cabrini Green and the Robert Taylor homes, had placed vulnerable people into a situation that brought about more crime, poverty, and misery. To remedy this, in 1971, the Chicago Housing Authority identified land for new housing for African American tenants. It was less dense (low rise) and scattered throughout the city in white neighborhoods. In 1972, it was announced that 32 of these sites were located on the Northwest side in the 38th, 39th, 41st, and 45th Wards.

The sentiment of local politicians had a familiar ring to it. Alderman Edwin Fifelski (45) indicated: “our area should not be burdened with public housing because the people of this community have reached a certain status that doesn’t call for public housing.” Alderman Anthony Laurino (39) said “it doesn’t fit in with the character of the neighborhood.” State Rep Ralph Capparelli reaffirmed his opposition: “...a critical need does exist the black and Spanish speaking areas of the city. If that’s where the need is greatest, then public housing should be built there.” Alderman Scholl (41) gathered a petition with 3000 signatures in his Ward to present to city council, claiming that their rights had been violated as citizens. The placement of this housing in white neighborhoods was not a random CHA decision. It was the result of a ruling by a Federal District Court in 1969; the Court found that CHA and HUD had selected sites that kept the city of Chicago purposefully segregated and had ruled that new housing must be built in white communities.



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CHA presented the housing plans to the community at Wright College in May of 1972. During the raucous presentation, hecklers and loud outbursts drove the meeting into chaos. The CHA presenters could not be heard over the bedlam, but at one point, in a fit of frustration, they threatened eminent domain over these properties. This further enraged the crowd, many of whom began shouting. Witnesses and the press indicated that most people were happy with the appearance of the homes, two-flats, and small apartment buildings. They were mostly opposed to who would reside in them.

Many community organizations vocally opposed the housing, such as the Big Oaks Improvement Association. Additionally, entirely new organizations sprung up, such as the Nucleus of Chicago Home-owners Association. (NO-CHA). In June of 1972, they held a large rally in Rosedale Park, and they filed a lawsuit against the city. They claimed the housing would violate the Environmental Policy Act, which guaranteed “safe and pleasing surroundings.” Later that year, the National Socialist White People’s Party marched through Jefferson Park at Lawrence and Linder. They pressed for blacks in the United States be sent back to Africa, and they claimed that whites can only survive through black repression.

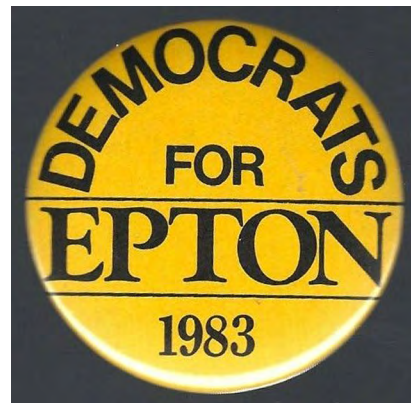
Ultimately, the CHA plan failed. Northwest side aldermen all voted it down, as their “aldermanic prerogative.” They did so at the wishes of many of their constituents. In defiance of the US District Court ruling, Mayor Richard Daley also rejected proposal, saying public housing should not go where it is not “accepted.”

In 1976, Supreme Court adopted those lower court findings that CHA and HUD had selected sites to maintain segregation. Aldermen had been allowed to veto sites suggested for CHA, which they did 99% of the time, including the 22 sites on the Northwest side. During the mayoral tenure of Richard J Daley, the city of Chicago had blocked CHA and HUD from complying with consent decrees and lower court decisions. After the US Supreme Court upheld the lower court’s order for HUD to construct buildings in white areas of Chicago, the response of CHA and HUD was to cease building altogether. Litigation dragged on for years, so even if they had complied, it would have been too late, as most of the vacant land had been developed. The number of African Americans in segregated, densely populated, and under-resourced areas continued to rise. Being legally and administratively barred from buying and owning property has resulted in lower overall wealth levels of black Americans today.

In the 1980’s, CHA planned once again to build “scattered site” housing on the Northwest side, and residents fought it once again, with the help of their Northwest side aldermen and aldermanic prerogative. Today, the far northwest side of Chicago is one of very few areas in Chicago that has no CHA development, and one of places with the fewest Affordable Housing units.

Mayor Harold Washington and the Northwest Side – 1983-1987

In April of 1983, Chicago elected its very first African American Mayor. At that time, mayoral elections were partisan; a primary was held in February for voters to select the desired candidate for their party, and in April a general election was held. In Chicago, every election since 1931 had been won by the Democratic contender – and regularly by a landslide. This meant that winning the Democratic Primary was a sure path to victory. However, 1983 was different.



Then Candidate Harold Washington and former Vice President Walter Mondale standing on the steps of Saint Pascal’s Church on Palm Sunday - March 27, 1983. His visit was cut short by angry anti-Washington demonstrators.

Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections

After winning the Democratic Primary against incumbent Mayor Jane Byrne and future Mayor Richard M. Daley, Harold Washington campaigned throughout the city. However, unlike years past when the Democratic machine and all associated politicians would back their party, this time they abandoned their nominee. Many in the party switched sides to throw their support behind the Republican candidate, Bernie Epton.

In March of 1983, Washington, along with former Vice President Walter Mondale, planned on attending St. Pascal, near the communities of Portage Park and Dunning. Washington was greeted by a jeering, angry mob, and the door of St. Pascal had been etched with a racial epithet. Some of the white churchgoers did express remorse and shame over the incident. The priest at St. Pascal, Father Ciezaldo said: "This is a middle-class Polish, Italian and Irish neighborhood in which some people feel they were uprooted in the past as blacks moved into their old communities. To them, Harold Washington's presence represents the beginning of blacks uprooting them again." The Northwest Side was still not comfortable with an African American presence.



St. Pascal's pastor, Rev. Francis A. Ciezadlo, standing between candidates Mondale and Washington on March 27, 1983

Photo from, "Prairie to Parish", courtesy of Frank Chambers Jr.

Harold Washington ultimately won the election, by 51.7%. Lifelong, loyal Democrats on the Northwest Side abandoned their party to vote for a white candidate. The chart below depicts the voting of the Northwest side wards, as well as their partisan records for the prior two elections:

WARD	General Election Vote % - Northwest Side Wards of Chicago					
	1975 Mayoral Election		1979 Mayoral Election		1983 Mayoral Election	
	Daley (D)	Hoellen (R)	Byrne (D)	Wallace (R)	Washington (D)	Epton (R)
36	77%	23%	78%	22%	5%	95%
38	73%	26%	74%	25%	6%	94%
39	72%	27%	77%	22%	12%	87%
41	68%	31%	71%	29%	7%	93%
45	68%	31%	73%	27%	7%	93%

In the years of the Washington Administration, the City Council was deeply divided. This era is referenced as the years of the "Council Wars." The division was drawn along (mostly) racial lines, with a white block (called the "Vrdolyak 29", in reference to the Councilman leader, Ed Vrdolyak) and another block of 16 black aldermen with a handful of more progressive white aldermen who dabbled outside machine politics. Throughout most of Washington's tenure, the Vrdolyak 29 worked against Washington, blocking mayoral legislation and replacements of council committee chairs and appointments to the Park District, Chicago Transit Authority, Board of Education, City Colleges, and other key agencies. All the aldermen on the Northwest Side were part of the Vrdolyak 29.

The Next Century: 1990-Today

Right after the turn of the century, as housing prices bubbled, the Northwest Side began to change. Many people from neighborhoods more proximate to downtown or the lake were priced out of their communities. Their attraction to Chicago mandated living in the city, but their financial situations necessitated more affordable housing options. Fortunately, there were a plethora of options on the Northwest Side. For the first time in many years, the Northwest Side saw an influx of 'intercity immigrants,' bringing with them their philosophies, their values, their culture, and their tastes. People on the Northwest Side were no longer a static group who had lived in the area for generations.

This evolution brought new minority communities into the area, as it no longer felt like an insular place to live. Mexicans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Bosnians, Koreans, and Ecuadoreans came to the Northwest Side. With them came a small African American population. While it is still a minute demographic, the black population grew by 300-400% in the years between 2000 and 2020.

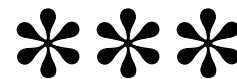
Today, the area has some of the lowest crime rates in Chicago. Additionally, income is well above the city average, and the schools perform better than in many other neighborhoods. As the community becomes more diverse, opportunities to share these amenities will raise the standard of living for all.

Today - 2020

The Northwest Side still has more progress to make. However, changes are afoot, and residents are beginning to write a new chapter in history. Young people are arriving and raising their families here, and more longtime residents are gaining a better understanding of how our history has affected our present. New legislation in Chicago mandates Affordable Housing in all new structures – something unthinkable 50 years ago. New buildings are being erected today on the Northwest Side, with accommodations set aside for the less fortunate.

The advent and prevalence of social media has brought to light commentary and viewpoints that are not always noble. Importantly, it has also enabled everyone to have a better understanding of injustice. It also helps to connect those who want to fight for better horizons. Over 1000 people, many of whom were local, participated in peaceful justice marches on the Northwest Side in 2020. Groups like "Neighbors for Affordable Housing" the "Northwest Side Coalition Against Racism & Hate" have appeared on the scene. The landscape is evolving as we map our new history.

As the Northwest Chicago Historical Society, we are committed to remembering the past, and we will continue to celebrate stories of progress and the achievements of those who came before us. However, we are committed to highlighting our entire past, even when it may include events that are uncomfortable or regrettable. When we have a better understanding of our history, we can genuinely work toward a better future.



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