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**Northwest Chicago
Historical Society**
Your Neighborhood Historical Society

Newsletter January 2021

Number XXXIII

**From Roscoe Village to Belmont Heights
Kolze's Electric Park and Other Groves**

This edition of the Northwest Chicago Society Newsletter focuses on Kolze's Grove in the Dunning neighborhood, along with other private picnic groves on the northwest side. These groves were a combination beer gardens, dance halls, entertainment centers, and music venues where people could enjoy fresh air at a time before air conditioning was available. Church groups, businesses, or social clubs would rent out the whole grove for their organizations and supply the food and drink through the proprietors. Since Kolze's closed before 1950, not many living people have memories of this place or any of the other groves.

Our organization would like to introduce you to a new undertaking, the "4KN." This new project is a walking museum that follows Irving Park Road (situated in the city at 4000N.) Led by The Chicago Public Art Group, American Indian Center, and Portage Park Neighborhood Association, it is a community-led proposal for an interpretive learning experience that invites people to visit neighborhoods and learn about local history along the road. The 4KN will weave an interpretive connection between the Chicago and Des Plaines Rivers, which celebrates the natural and cultural living histories of local communities and Native-American contributions through art, education, recreation, and local histories. NWCHS is part of the steering committee that will continue to bring this project alive in the coming years.

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on our city, bringing financial, educational, and mental hardship for many in Chicago. This year, we begin the 20's, the third decade of the millennium. We are optimistic that this year and the coming years will bring health, hope, and happiness for all on the Northwest Side.

Hope to see you again "in person" in 2021! - *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 We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications.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.



1957 photo of Goldbatt's located on Belmont Avenue west of Central Avenue.

Visit our website: <http://nwchicagohistory.org>

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NW Chicago Historical Society

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Membership:

\$15.00 per calendar year

\$10.00 for 65 years old and over

Phone: 773-725-5774

Letters

Letters may have been edited for clarity and space

Sorry for the random email. I had a NW side history question and thought you'd be the right person to ask.

On Jefferson Park Forward's Facebook page, there was a recent post about streets jutting from their straight course due to the Indian Boundary Line. I assumed this explained the weird configuration of Foster Avenue and Gettysburg Street.

However, I went to the city of Chicago's database of plats and it seemed to show otherwise. The plat shows the Indian Boundary Line being a good 1,000 feet or so from this odd intersection of streets.

So why does Foster Avenue deviate from its straight course? Is there another explanation for this that's not the Indian Boundary Line?

Please let me know. I appreciate it! Cheers,

Chris Szmurlo - Jefferson Park

The streets affected by the Indian Boundary Line are just streets that run north and south (Central, Austin, Narragansett and Oak Park) which I believe is from a mistake in the original land survey done between North Ave on the south and the IBL on the north. You will notice that the same streets do not line up at North Ave. For more information on the streets that were affected by the Indian Boundary Line see the article "The Central Avenue Jog" in our newsletter at our website: <https://nwchicagohistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/JPHS-Jan-2007.pdf>

As for Foster Ave, I think the problem is that too many streets are coming together at one point. Milwaukee, Central, Foster, and Northwest Hwy. Of course, this is just a guess on my part. You will notice that some of the side streets north of Foster do not follow the north and south grid but line up perpendicular to Elston. I think Foster was the last road to come though here and was subject to what was left of a route to follow. - NWCHS



Photo of the Foster bridge looking west taken on November 5, 1924. There are 3 bridges on Foster Avenue over the north branch of the Chicago River and we do not know which one is in the photo. Early maps do not show Foster Avenue crossing over the Chicago River at these locations near Pulaski (Crawford) Avenue. The cost of bridge construction in crossing over the river three times most likely delayed Foster becoming a through street to Milwaukee Avenue.

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Letters

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I'm enquiring if you have any information of the miniature metal coin bank building. I've attached a picture of it here. It's the Kimbell Trust and Savings Bank lead bank made by A.C. Rehbecker - I'm trying to track one of these down as I collect these miniature building banks.

Any contact information for previous managers or owners would be very helpful if possible.

I appreciate any help you can provide!

- Jon

The Kimbell Trust & Savings Bank building was designated a Chicago Landmark in 2008 and is located at 3600 W. Fullerton Avenue. We have no idea where you may find a miniature metal bank building. Photo of the miniature metal bank building is shown on the right. - NWCHS



Your history of segregation piece in the NWCHS newsletter was helpful to me in learning just how deep the roots of racism are in the neighborhood.

Thank you.

Rev. Gayle Tucker, Pastor
Congregational Church of Jefferson Park.

...I saw your latest NWCHS newsletter issue and all the research you did in reference to Northwest Side tensions regarding minority communities and residency. ...It was very good. ...I think it is a great thing for the community. I wanted to thank you for what you did in this issue, and for the work you do on all the issues."

Glenn Nadig, Publisher of Nadig Newspapers
(phone message regarding the article "Segregation on the Northwest Side" July 2020 newsletter)

Thank you! If anyone missed this article, all the Northwest Chicago Historical Society newsletters can be found on our website site at: www.nwchicagohistory.org - NWCHS

Letters

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Many, many thanks for this wonderful newsletter that allows those of us who grew up on the northwest side of Chicago in the 40's, 50's and 60's to once again journey back to those golden days and relive our younger years. We're also able to not only awaken those memories, but to share them – in print and pictures – with our friends and loved ones and to tell our children and grandchildren of that beloved time in our lives.

I lived in Old Irving Park from 1940-1946, on the border of Gladstone and Jefferson Parks from 1946-1956 and Portage Park from 1956-1958, then again from 1959-1961, so the northwest side is truly a part of my “DNA”.

Along with the shops and restaurants on Milwaukee Ave. that other readers have shared, I wonder if anyone else remembers these three: Moy Lee Chinese restaurant and carryout, the fresh chicken store where you made choice, they chopped off the head and you carried it home by the feet!) and Gronau's drug store. These were all just north of Gale St. and the first 2 were on the west side of the street and the drug store was on the east side just south of the train station, (this was all before the Gale Street Inn and to the best of my remembrance during the early 50's).

You've made it possible for me to go “Up Jeff” again, see movies at the Irving, Gateway, Times and the Jeff theaters again and enjoy memories of those carefree days at Independence, Jefferson and Portage Parks through your wonderful pages.

Thank you again for making this all possible.

Patricia Hall - Huntley, IL
NWCHS Member

Photo of the Times Theater. The theater was located at 4847 N. Milwaukee Avenue and closed in the mid 50s. The building was turned into the Holiday Ballroom which operated until the mid 80s. The building was demolished around 1988.



6.

Loraine Suerth - From Roscoe Village to Belmont Heights

The NWCHS met with Loraine Suerth a lifelong resident of Chicago and now lives in Jefferson Park. She was the youngest daughter of Anna and Adolf Mehr and was born at home at 1535 Towns Court in Chicago in 1928. The house and street are no longer there but it was located just south of North Avenue, just east of Halsted Street. Her father was born in Germany and her mother was born in Hungary.

One of her earliest memories is of living in an old building on Hoyne Avenue near Roscoe (Roscoe Village) in a back apartment on the second floor. This building is still standing and has been remodeled. Loraine shared this apartment with her parents, her older brother Matt, and her older sister Dorothy. Her father worked as a baker when he could find work but this was during the Great Depression and her family was on Government Relief Aid. She remembers the family getting dried fruit and oatmeal. She also remembers standing in line for clothes and shoes and the next day, noticing all the other young girls were wearing the same dress she had on.

During the hot summer, a fireman who lived across the street would open a fire hydrant for the neighborhood children to cool off. There was an “Iceman” who delivered ice for their ice box so they could keep their food cold. However, the most exciting thing for the children was Riverview Park. Riverview Park was their playground and if they did not sneak into the park, they waited for “two cent day” so they could make a day of it.

Like many families during the Depression, her parents lost their home and moved around alot. At one time, they lived on Lincoln and Oakdale Avenues, near St. Alphonsus Church; on Oakley Avenue; and two places on Hoyne Avenue. By 1936, Loraine's father worked with the WPA paving streets for a while until he could find work as a baker.

In 1938, her parents purchased a house at 3227 N. Oriole Avenue in the Belmont Heights area of Chicago. Loraine described the neighborhood as beautiful. Gone were the problems with rats and the crowding of buildings and people. The neighborhood had very few homes, maybe four or five per block and their house had one of the new electric ice boxes a/k/a refrigerator. The house was heated by a coal burning potbelly stove in the dining room but had a gas stove in the kitchen for cooking. Loraine recalled her mother planted a vegetable garden in the backyard which consisted of string beans, tomatoes, cucumbers and kohlrabi along with an apple tree and flowers. At harvest time, some of the produce was canned for the winter months. They also had chickens in the backyard that produced fresh eggs. The house has recently been demolished and replaced with a new house.



The Mehr children; Loraine, Matt and Dorthy. Photo taken in Roscoe Village.

7.

The children attended William E. Dever school in the neighborhood and then attended Steinmetz High School. Grocery shopping was done at the neighborhood store, National Tea, located on the Elmwood Park side of Belmont Avenue. The closest food store was the Termini Grocery store at 7606 W. Belmont Avenue, a small storefront where Loraine would sometime be sent to purchase 10¢ worth of hard salami or other quickly needed items.

Loraine's mother would sometimes walk to Grand and Harlem Avenues to do some shopping but for the most part, the family would shop at Belmont and Central Avenues. Day old bread could be cheaply purchased from a side street storefront a few blocks west of where they lived. Since no one had a car in the family until after the war, the Belmont trolley was their only mode of transportation. At that time, the Belmont trolley ran from Halsted Street west to Central Avenue. At Central Avenue, one would walk a block or two further west to catch an electric trolleybus. One bus would end at the turnaround at Octavia and one would end at the turnaround at Cumberland. If you got onto the Octavia bus, you had a few blocks to walk. With the neighborhood being so thinly populated, you knew all of the people on the bus and you knew what stops they got off at.

The closest city park at that time was Shabbona Park, where the boys in the neighborhood would play 16 inch softball and be in leagues. During the winter, ice skating was available at the park or a neighbor would flood an empty lot at the corner of Oriole and Belmont Avenues. Unauthorized night ice skating happened at the Elmwood Cemetery. To access the cemetery, one would have to sneak in at night through the woods that occupied the area south of Belmont Avenue between Pacific Avenue (80th Avenue) and Cumberland Avenue. Walking through the woods into a cemetery at night was a frightening thing to do but when you started to hear the other skaters on the pond, your fears soon dissipated.

Loraine's parents: Anna and Adolf Mehr. Photo taken outside of the original church at St. Celestine's in Elmwood Park (ca. 1950)



8.

During World War II, Loraine's 17 year old brother, Matt, enlisted in the Army and left for Europe. Meanwhile, Loraine and her sister found jobs here at home. Since Loraine was underage, her father changed the date of birth on her birth certificate so she could work. Loraine's first job (at 15) was at Hall Printing on Diversey Avenue, a major employer in the area that printed magazines, brochures among other things. She also worked at Zenith Radio (Dickens and Austin Avenues), Woolworths on State Street and then at a candy counter at the Times Theater in Jefferson Park. However, the job she liked the most was working the switchboard at the telephone company. At that time, many telephone operators were needed because direct dialing was not available - all calls placed had to be manually connected through an operator.

The war years brought victory gardens and makeshift commemorative markers decorating light poles on street corners that paid tribute to local men and women overseas. It also brought on ration coupons and shortages of non-essential goods. The government issued restrictions on some food items and other commodities in order to discourage hoarding. Every American was entitled to a series of war ration books filled with stamps that could be used to buy restricted items along with payment for the items. Loraine remembers having to go to Maxwell Street (a mile long area where everything from shoestrings to expensive clothing was sold - now has moved to Maxwell Street Market) to purchase a pair of roller skates. She also remembers saving the foil from the gum wrappers and then peeling the paper off the foil. Her school collected this foil, along with the empty metal tube of toothpaste for the war effort.

While Loraine's brother was in the Army, she recalled the FBI coming to visit the family in their home. With her father having been born in Germany and her brother serving in the U.S. Army, her father would sometimes voice his opinion about the people in Washington not knowing what they were doing. Germanophobia or Anti-German sentiment was prevalent during WWII and no doubt, a neighbor reported his verbal outbreaks. The FBI tore up the whole house and confiscated their camera and radio, but did return them after the war. Anti-German sentiment also blocked the German Clubs from having their annual picnic at Riverview Park. Most picnics relocated to Kolze's Grove which made it easier for Loraine and her family to attend.

For the next 75 years or so, Loraine stayed in the Belmont Heights area, living on other "O" streets: Ottawa, Oleander, Olcott, Overhill and O'Connor Drive. She got married in 1949 and they raised a family of three children and saw the neighborhood change from empty lots to a built up part of Chicago. The whole family agreed that there was no better place to grow up.

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Kolze's Electric Park (Kolze's Grove)

Kolze's Electric Park was located along the south side of Irving Park Road just east of 64th Street (now Narragansett Avenue) in the sparsely developed Dunning neighborhood of Chicago.

It was operated by Henry James Kolze, who owned a two-story roadside Inn, Restaurant and Tavern on the site to serve visitors to nearby cemeteries and the Cook County Mental Hospital. The extension of streetcar service to the area in 1896 boosted traffic along Irving Park Boulevard and enhanced the commercial possibilities of the site.

Kolze responded by developing a picnic grove in the wooded area behind his restaurant. By 1905, the park featured a dancing pavilion, a shooting gallery, various concession stands, and bright night-time illumination, hence the name "Electric Park."

By 1924, several new booths and refreshment stands were added. Records also indicate that Kolze acquired additional property to the south of the original park, pushing its southern boundary to present Byron Avenue. The picnic grove remained in operation until the late 1940s.



Shown in photo, picnic tables with the dance hall in the background. Many clubs and church groups rented the entire facility for the day to hold their annual picnics. Private groves or beer gardens were common on the northwest side. Many were located near the Chicago River like Riverview Park. The Polonia Grove was at Higgins and McVickers. Two smaller groves, the Elm Tree Grove and the Maple Grove were located nearby on Irving Park Road just west of Narragansett. (Photo ca. 1948).

Photo Courtesy of the Sulzer Regional Library Historical Room, Chicago Public Library

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Kolze's two-story restaurant and tavern - roadside inn. (ca. 1910)

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A 1918 poster advertising an upcoming event at Kolze's Electric Park



Looking east on Irving Park Road at 64th Street, (now Narragansett Avenue) in the Dunning neighborhood of Chicago. (ca. 1905). The structure with the arches was the entrance to Kolze's Electric Park which dates back to 1896, with hotel, restaurant and tavern (seen in foreground) owner Henry James Kolze decided to create an attraction for riders of the newly-reaching streetcar line. Purchasing wooded land near his inn, Kolze first strung large gas lamps to offer a nightly orchestra. It was one of the first parks in Chicago to later be illuminated by electric lighting.



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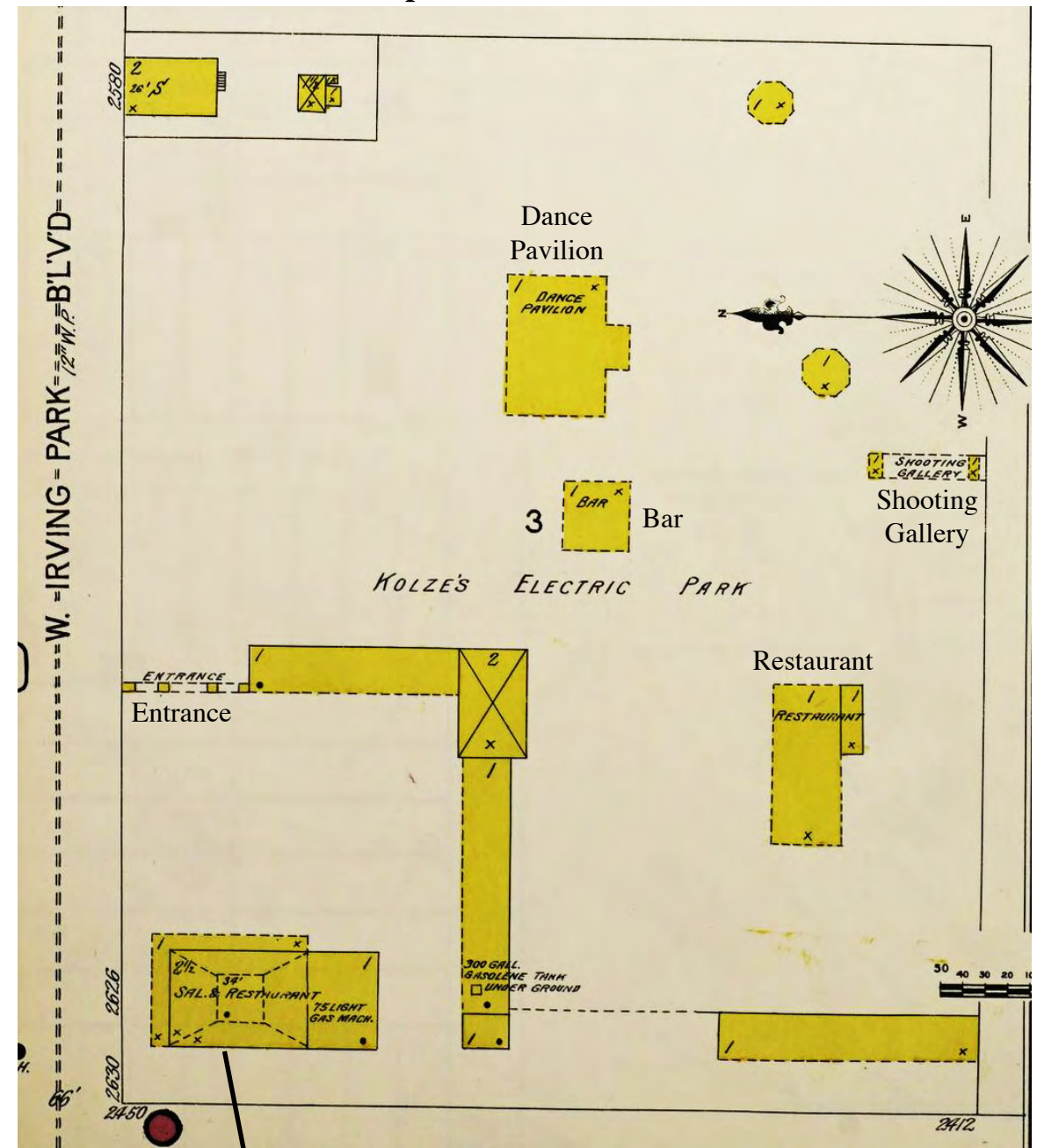
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1905 Map of Kolze's Electric Park



Kolze's Salon & Restaurant (Outside the Park)

Narragansett Avenue

Sanborn Fire Map 1905



18.



Photos from the Chicago Park District Collection, Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library

Upper photo shows the dance pavilion with the beer stand on the right where patrons could purchase beers for five cents a glass.

Photo on the upper left, shows some of the over nine acres of picnic area available to guests.

Photo on lower left, is of an entrance to the dance pavilion where couples could dance the night away to popular tunes provided by a live orchestra. Photos taken on October 28, 1949.

In 1950, the Chicago Park District acquired the property and announced plans to convert the picnic grove into a public park. In subsequent years, the Chicago Park District demolished 19 of the 20 buildings on the site. The one left standing was the original clapboard tavern which was the park's field house until a new brick facility was erected in 1969. These structures were replaced with athletic fields, tennis courts, and a children's playground. The new park is now known as Merrimac Park.

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H. JAMES KOLZE'S
FINE ELECTRIC PARK
AND HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS
Cor. Irving Park Boulevard and N. W. 64th Street
CHICAGO

19.



Inside views of the dance pavilion. Photos take on October 28, 1949.
Photos from the Chicago Park District Collection, Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library



Kolze's Grove parking. Photo taken September 16, 1948.



Indoor activities in one of the 20 buildings. Photo taken April 18, 1950.
Photos from the Chicago Park District Collection, Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library
21.

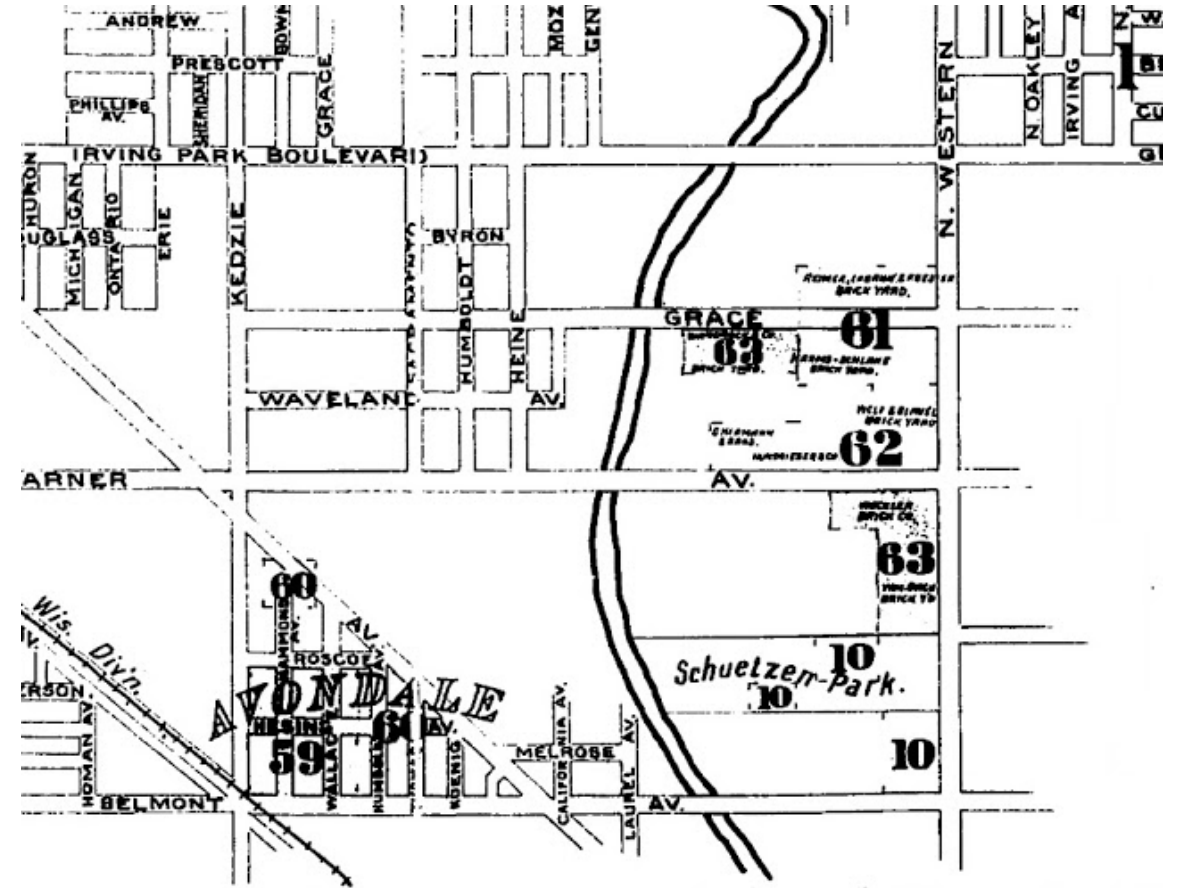


The dismantling of Kolze's Restaurant viewed from the Narragansett side. (ca. 1949)



Looking west down Irving Park Road with Kolze's Restaurant gone. (ca. 1949)

Other Picnic Groves Schutzen Park/Riverview



Sanborn Fire Map 1894

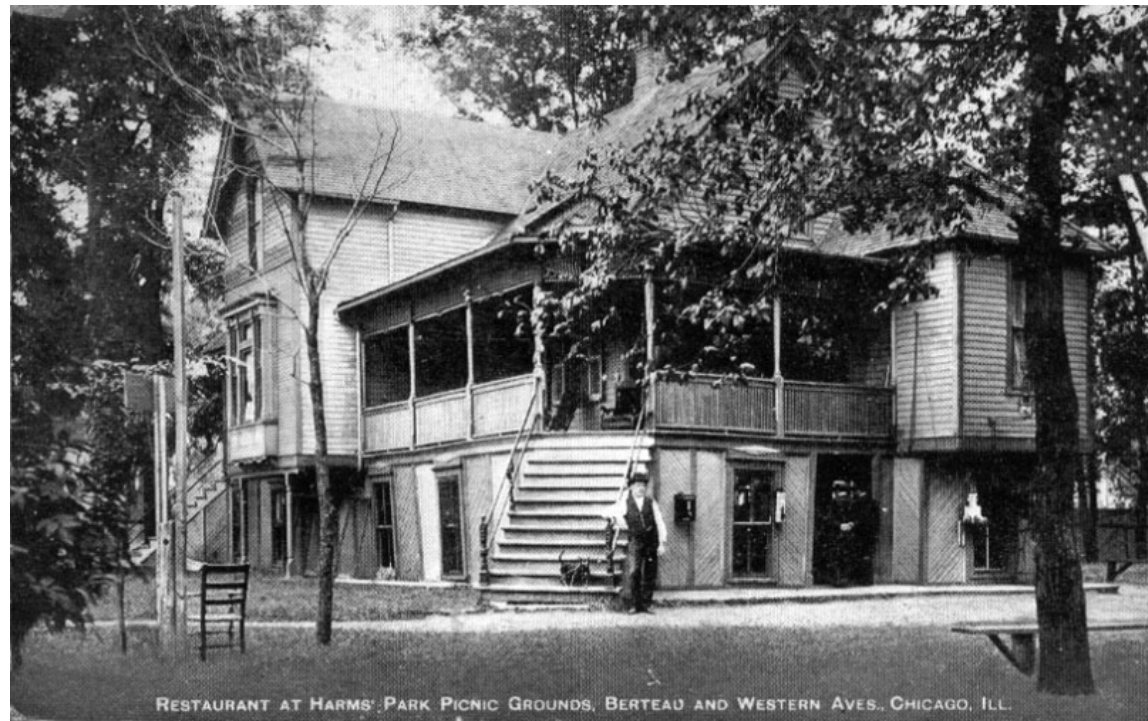
Located north of Belmont Avenue and west of Western Avenue, Schuetzen Park was started in 1879 as a rifle range (also known as Sharpshooter Park) by Chicagoans of German descent. As the men practiced their sharp shooting skills, the women and children brought picnic baskets and enjoyed the outdoors.

By the early 1900s, the park became known as Riverview Sharpshooters Park and live music was added with a dance hall. With the park adding acreage, soon a playground, pony rides, pop & ice cream stands, a restaurant and beer stands. The name eventually was changed to Riverview Park.

Harms Park



HARMS' PARK PICNIC GROUNDS, BERTEAU AND WESTERN AVES., CHICAGO, ILL.



RESTAURANT AT HARMS' PARK PICNIC GROUNDS, BERTEAU AND WESTERN AVES., CHICAGO, ILL.

Polonia Grove



Photo of a hand bill above of Polonia Grove, located at Higgins and McVickers Avenues. Back side advertises a good band will play in the Park hall and that refreshments will be served.

Two photos on the left of Harms Park Picnic Grove, located on the northeast corner of Western and Berneau Avenues.



Henry Harms

Courtesy of the Skokie Historical Society

The land owner, Henry Harms, started the park in 1883. He is best known as the founder of the village of Niles Center (Skokie). Harms Road and Harms Woods are also named after him.

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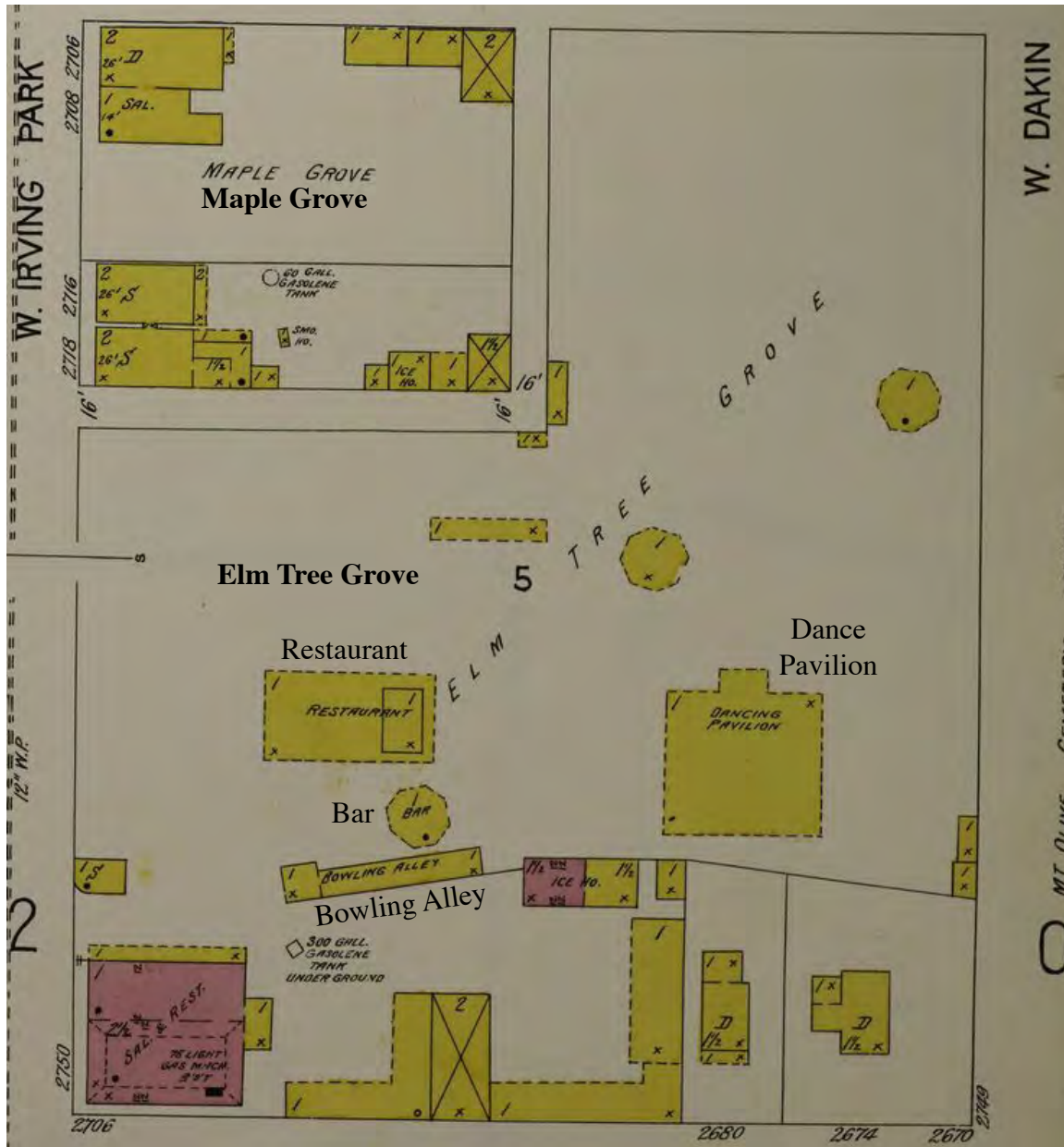
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Maple Grove and Elm Tree Grove
Narragansett Avenue



Sanborn Fire Map 1905

Maple Grove and Elm Tree Grove were located across the street from Kolze's Grove on the southwest corner of Irving Park Road and Narragansett Avenue. Both were much smaller than Kolze's Grove but Elm Tree Grove did have bowling lanes.

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