

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MOBILIZING THE PAST: LOCAL HISTORY AND COMMUNITY ACTION IN MODERN
METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

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INTRODUCTION

On May 12, 1976, Leon Despres, Hyde Park's recently retired alderman, gave a speech to more than two hundred Hyde Park residents gathered in the auditorium at St. Thomas the Apostle School. Hyde Park, a neighborhood on Chicago's south side, had recently emerged from two decades of urban renewal and Despres took this opportunity to celebrate its legacy in Hyde Park. He credited urban renewal's success to the "quality of [Hyde Park's] residents," and specifically to their willingness to build a "stable inter-racial community of high standards" whose members came together to "resolve" urban decay "by a bold and inspired planning effort." But he also encouraged them to remain vigilant, saying "it is dangerous to relax about planning, because the periods of such relaxation were the periods when decay silently crept up on Hyde Park." Chicago's civic leaders, including Despres, believed poor planning created substandard urban environments, which made affected areas more accessible to poor Chicagoans. This fear was particularly acute in Hyde Park, where the interracial middle-class residential population cultivated during urban renewal worried about the potential in-migration of poor, black Chicagoans from adjacent Black Belt neighborhoods. In addition, Despres warned, Hyde Park's advantageous "geographic position" near Lake Michigan, as well as the relatively easy distance between Hyde Park and downtown Chicago, made it attractive to city officials looking for neighborhoods in which to situate new airports, highways, and other major infrastructure projects. Despres believed they needed to pay attention to planning in their

neighborhood and push back against any threats to its integrity or risk another episode of decay, blight, and economic uncertainty.¹

Despres did not deliver his speech to a local neighborhood organization or agency involved in urban renewal, like the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference or the South East Chicago Commission. The people he spoke to that Wednesday evening came to St. Thomas' to learn more about efforts to establish a local historical society in Hyde Park. Despres tied Hyde Park's future survival to an understanding of its past, saying in his speech, "Why do we, as Hyde Parkers, study the history of Hyde Park?...We...want to know accurately what the forces were that made Hyde Park good and great, so that we can accentuate those forces in our present and future." He shared a local history in which he identified "four crucial factors in [Hyde Park's] development" and explained how a historical society "stimulates the preparation and retention of the materials we need for the study of history, and...provides the resources for learning accurately what occurred and therefore for making necessary decisions for the present and future." Despres believed a healthy Hyde Park required leaders able to draw lessons from the past when planning for the future, and he hoped a local historical society could help stimulate interest in Hyde Park history and provide a resting place for its many historic documents, images, and artifacts. To Despres and others working to organize a historical society in Hyde Park, their endeavor was as much about the present and future as it was about the past.²

¹ Leon Despres was the alderman for Chicago's fifth ward, which includes Hyde Park, from 1955 to 1975. See Leon M. Despres papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL. The term "Black Belt" refers to "the predominately African American community on Chicago's South Side." See Wallace Best, "Black Belt," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/140.html>, accessed July 2019. "Plenty of HP enthusiasm," *Hyde Park Herald*, May 19, 1976; and Leon Despres, "What's Past is Prologue: A View of the History of Hyde Park," May 12, 1976, both from Hyde Park Historical Society (HPS) collections, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL.

² See chapter three for more about the Hyde Park Historical Society, Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, and South East Chicago Commission. Despres, "What's Past is Prologue."

Hyde Park residents were not alone in their decision to form a local historical society at this time. The Hyde Park Historical Society was one of more than one hundred local historical societies founded in the Chicago metropolitan region, and one of thousands founded across the United States, after World War II. Historical societies had existed in the United States since the late 1700s, but the vast majority opened in the second half of the twentieth century. Historians and other scholars are well aware of this phenomenon and have generally attributed the postwar spike in historical society formation to a surge in popular interest in history and heritage. Two world wars, the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, and the socially and politically turbulent 1960s led some to search for a return to the tradition and familiarity of their childhoods while, for others, the publication and subsequent television broadcast of Alex Haley's *Roots* provoked interest in local history as it related to genealogical research. Great Society initiatives in the mid-to-late 1960s also increased support for and interest in "cultural production of many kinds" and newly founded state branches of the National Endowment for the Humanities provided funding sources for people interested in pursuing local history work. In some communities, local commissions formed to coordinate Bicentennial celebrations encouraged study of the local past as it related to the history and development of the United States. In addition, threats posed to historic architecture by urban renewal and suburban development mobilized a new generation of historic preservationists, whose efforts were supported in part by the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. Meanwhile, new highways, as well as the increased affordability of the personal automobile, facilitated access to historic sites for people interested in satisfying their historical curiosity. The postwar appreciation for history and heritage,

historians argue, created an environment in which people formed local historical societies in record numbers to engage directly with the local past.³

Despite the ample attention paid to the postwar rise in heritage work, few scholars have considered how people used their historical societies after their formation, or how the projects they undertook through their societies impacted their homeplaces. Instead, they argue, local history enthusiasts formed and joined historical societies to explore their interest in history and genealogy and find solace from the modern world in an earlier, more familiar time. In 1979, for example, David Gerber wrote that people embraced local history because they wanted to “return to the presumed security of the most elemental units of life—church, neighborhood...and [find] inspiration in the study of the history of the family.” While not untrue—people did, and still do, join historical societies because they enjoy remembering and learning about the past—their reasons for doing so were often much more complicated.⁴

Though few scholars have looked at local historical societies through a critical lens, many have explored how Americans use local history to affect political and social change in other

³ For historians who have studied local history’s place in postwar heritage work, see Willard Gatewood, “The Rediscovery of Local History,” *Georgia Archive* 3 (1975); Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Community Studies, Urban History, and American Local History,” in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, *A Culture at Risk: Who Cares for America’s Heritage* (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1984); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); David A. Gerber, “Local and Community History: Some Cautionary Remarks on an Idea Whose Time Has Returned,” *The History Teacher* 13 (1979) and reprinted in Carol Kammen, ed. *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996); Barbara Franco, “In Urban History Museums and Historical Societies” and Charles F. Bryan, Jr., “In State Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies: A Constant State of Change,” both in James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds., *Public History: Essays from the Field* 2nd ed. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2004); Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003); and Amy Levin, *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America’s Changing Communities* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007). Phillips and Hogan, 27-28.

⁴ Bob Beatty is among the few who have considered the history of a local historical society and the impact its founders and members had in its region. See Bob Beatty, “Legacy to the People: The Civic Origins of the Orange County Regional History Center,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol. 81 (3), 2002. Gerber, 216.

contexts. In his 1984 article, “The ‘New’ Social History, Local History, and Community Empowerment,” for example, Clarke Chambers wrote that people could use local history to “gain control over their own communities [and] make [a] significant impact on the formulation of public policies.” Similarly, in *Taking History to Heart*, James Green urged historians and enthusiasts to “make...history come alive in certain communities and...make it relevant to ongoing efforts to organize for social change.” He called this “movement history,” a branch of history generally unrecognized by the historical profession but under which falls community organizing efforts that use local history as an advocacy tool. Other scholars have explored how black Americans mobilized the past to secure civil rights and combat racism. In his 2015 work, *A Nation of Neighborhoods*, for example, Benjamin Looker discussed how the founders of the Anacostia Museum, which opened in a poor, predominantly black area of Washington D.C. in 1967, used local history to build and support a network of people fighting to improve living conditions in their neighborhood.⁵

That significant scholarship about the connections between local history and advocacy work exists demonstrates the need for a more critical analysis of the ways local historical societies operated in and influenced their communities. In this project, I attempt to recover

⁵ See Clarke Chambers, “The ‘New’ Social History, Local History, and Community Empowerment,” *Minnesota History* vol. 49 (1), spring 1984, 14; James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 1; and Benjamin Looker, *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For more on black history museums and their impact, see James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-Americans and Museums: Toward a Policy of Inclusion,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Spencer R. Crew, “African Americans, History and Museums: Preserving African American History in the Public Arena,” in Gaynor Kavanagh, ed., *Making Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Ian Rocksborough-Smith, *Black Public History in Chicago: Civil Rights Activism from World War II Into the Cold War* (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018); and, especially, James F. Brooks, Deborah L. Mack, and John S. Welch, eds., “Special Issue: State of Black Museums: Historiography Commemorating the Founding and Existence of Black Museums Over Four Decades.” *The Public Historian* vol. 40 (3), 2018.

portions of this history by examining local historical societies established in the Chicago metropolitan area after World War II. Chicago provides an ideal setting for this study. Since the founding of the Chicago Historical Society (now the Chicago History Museum) in 1856, at least 178 local historical societies opened across the Chicago metropolis. I was able to determine founding dates for 132 of those 178 and, of the 132 with known founding dates, 118 were formed between 1955 and the present. Of those 118, 99 opened between 1955 and 1985, and the remaining nineteen opened in between 1985 and 2019. These numbers indicate that, of all local historical societies formed in the Chicago metropolitan area since 1856, 99 of the 132—fully 75 percent—with known founding dates opened in a thirty-year period between 1955 and 1985 (see table 1).⁶

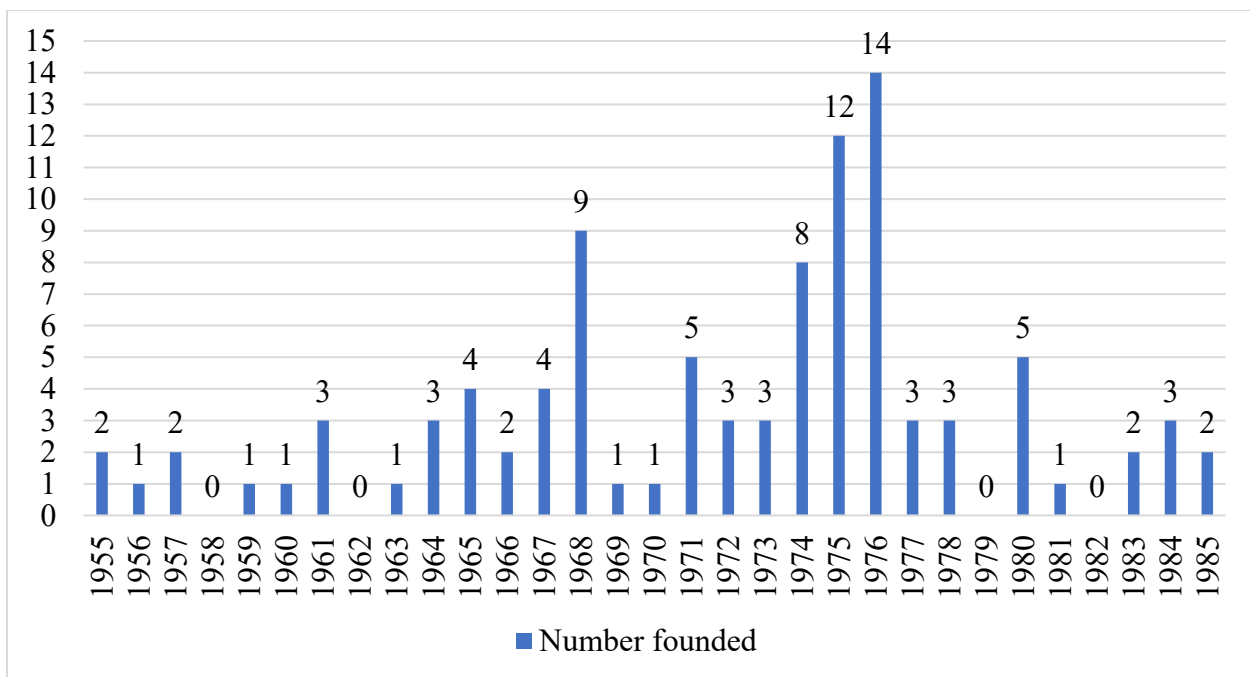


Table 1. Chicago area local historical society formation by year, 1955-1985
See Appendix A for the full list, including founding dates.

⁶ See Appendix A for additional detail. Appendix A contains a near comprehensive list of all local historical societies founded in the Chicago metropolitan area since the Chicago Historical Society opened in 1856. It also includes a very small number of heritage associations, heritage societies, and historical associations whose members share the same approach to local history work as local historical societies. Preservation societies, house museums, genealogical societies, ethnic societies, local history museums, and historical commissions are not included here.

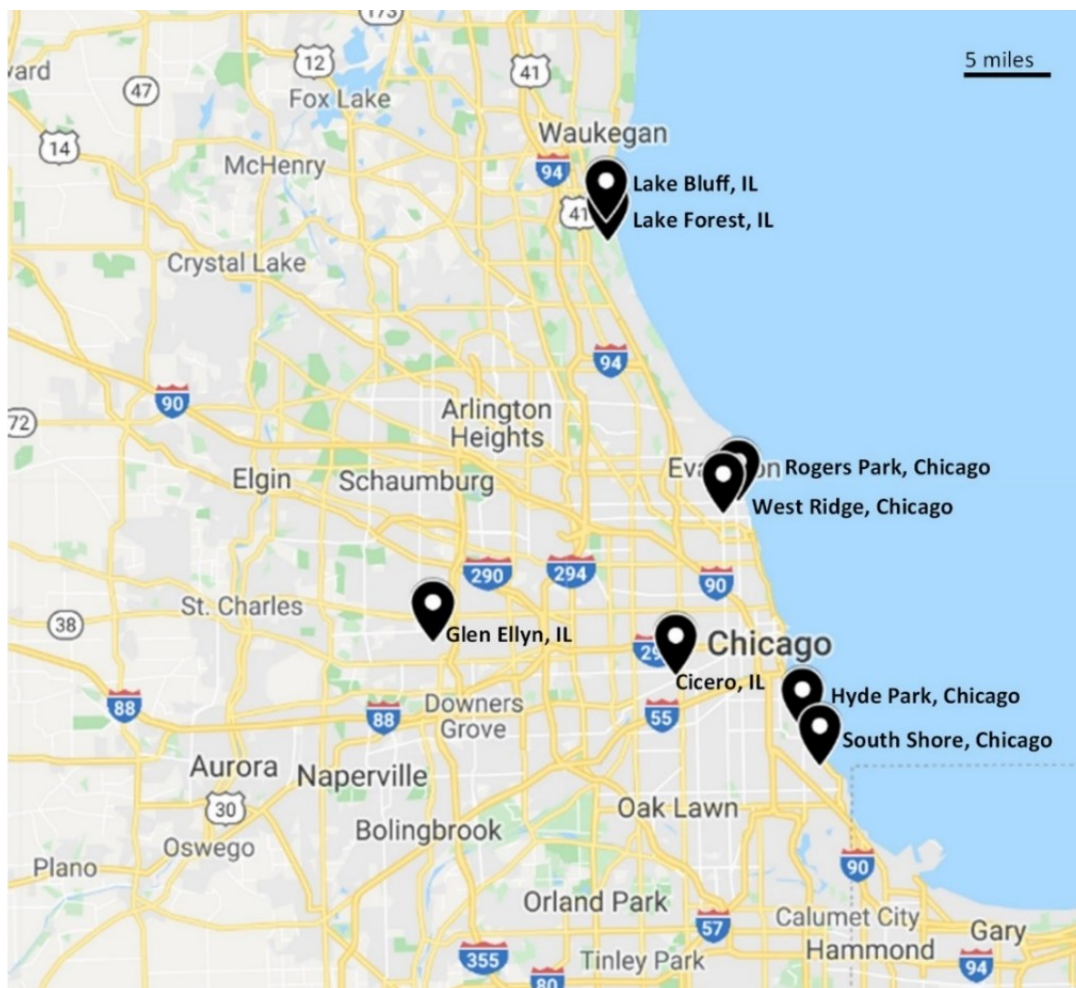


Figure 1. The locations of the historical societies considered in this dissertation.
Source: Base map from Google Maps.

I chose to focus on seven local historical societies founded in Chicago and its suburbs at the height of the postwar historical society movement. They include: the first Rogers Park Historical Society, the Glen Ellyn Historical Society, the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society (now the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff), the second Rogers Park Historical Society (now the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society), the Hyde Park Historical Society, the South Shore Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Cicero, founded in 1968, 1968, 1972, 1975, 1976, 1978, and 1983, respectively. I tried to ensure as broad a geographic coverage as possible, and the seven societies I chose represent four Chicago neighborhoods (Rogers Park,

West Ridge, Hyde Park, and South Shore), as well as four suburban municipalities (Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero) (see figure 1). I do not claim to provide an exhaustive understanding of the entire postwar local history movement in Chicago. The seven case studies I share in this dissertation reveal characteristics common to local historical societies, but the ways their founders used these organizations reflect their own unique historical circumstances.

Ultimately, my research shows that people who founded local historical societies in metropolitan Chicago after World War II did so for reasons beyond personal interest in and appreciation for history. Indeed, what I found studying these seven societies complicates what we know about local responses to economic disinvestment, white racism and flight, and population migrations across the postwar metropolis.⁷ In each of the cases I examined, residents formed local historical societies to claim authority over the local past, which they used to influence who had access to their towns and neighborhoods during a time of significant population flux and demographic change. HPHS organizers, for example, formed a historical society to protect their neighborhood from economic instability provoked by the in-migration of poor Chicagoans, and especially poor black Chicagoans, from adjacent neighborhoods on Chicago's south side. These factors contributed to calls for urban renewal by Hyde Park residents in the 1950s and 1960s, and HPHS founders founded their historical society in the mid-

⁷ Population migrations were not unique to Chicago. For more on urban deconcentration and population migrations throughout the twentieth century, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Gregory Squires, Larry Bennett, Kathleen McCourt, and Philip Nyden, *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: a History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue, eds, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

1970s to negotiate urban renewal's legacy in Hyde Park and prevent a recurrence of Hyde Park's mid-century "crisis." Residents in other neighborhoods and municipalities followed suit, forming historical societies to protect entrenched local identities as white and white ethnic Chicagoans moved further from the city's urban core, black Chicagoans worked to dismantle and move beyond boundaries separating Chicago's ghettos from the rest of the metropolis, and Latino people, new immigrants, and poor whites searched for stable housing and municipal services in a city shaken by deindustrialization.⁸

The Chicago-area residents responsible for organizing the seven local historical societies explored in this project did so within this complex postwar world. They adopted traditions established by older state and local historical societies, like collecting historic materials, operating small museums, preserving historic structures, and hosting lectures and other programs about the local past, but they also made choices in response to their own contemporary concerns and interests. As the HPHS example indicates, and as this project illustrates, people founding local historical societies created usable pasts to combat perceived crises in their communities.⁹

⁸ According to David Roediger, white ethnics include immigrants whose descendants gradually "became" white after a generation or two of settlement in the United States. The use of the term "white ethnic" grew in popularity in the early twentieth century and was generally used to distinguish newcomers immigrating from "southern and eastern Europe" from both black Americans and white Americans with roots in "whiter" countries in "northern and western Europe." In these cases, white ethnic generally referred to "dark white" immigrants who occupied a kind of racial middle ground between black and white. I utilize the term white ethnic in this project to refer to Chicago's late nineteenth and twentieth century European (including Russian and Jewish) immigrants and their descendants, which includes people who grew up in the "urban villages" (ethnic enclaves in which immigrants lived and negotiated dual identities as both immigrants and Americans) disintegrating as their occupants migrated to new communities after World War II. See Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 27. The term "urban village" is drawn from "urban villagers," a concept perhaps most famously known from Herbert Gans' study about urban renewal and white ethnic displacement in Boston's West End in the 1950s. See Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁹ Creating usable pasts is not a postwar phenomenon, nor is it an activity unique to people working with local historical societies. In reference to their study in the early 1990s about how Americans use history in "everyday life," for example, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen wrote, "Americans make the past part of their everyday routines and turn to it as a way of grappling with profound questions about how to live" and confront "questions

Founders generally tied their historical society boundaries to, and claimed jurisdiction within, their village, town, city, or neighborhood limits and many believed their historical societies provided a civic service akin to those provided by local governments, libraries, schools, and law enforcement. Their ability to claim official historical authority over their homeplaces was very much dependent on their race—the people forming these organizations were usually white—and connections to elected and civic officials, and they used their power and privilege to shape decisions about the places they claimed to represent in ways not available to everyone in equal measure.

I focus on local historical societies specifically, instead of house museums, history museums (which are often operated by historical societies), preservation societies, and other kinds of local history groups, because people establishing historical societies made a deliberate choice to adopt the historical society name and model. Historical society founders introduced in chapters two, three, and four knew about and embraced the historical society tradition when they decided to open new societies in their communities. They discussed other local historical societies and the Illinois State Historical Society at their earliest meetings, and many established connections with and sought advice from people involved in older Chicago-area historical societies. Founding and joining historical societies provided a way for people interested in history to engage directly with the past without intervention or mediation by professional gatekeepers, as well as establish authority over history as it happened within a particular neighborhood or municipality. They created and shared their own historical narratives and used their collective power and influence, to varying degrees of success, to claim ownership over local

about relationships, identity, immortality, and agency.” See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 18.

history. Focusing on local historical societies also shines a spotlight on the particular ways white people used their societies to reinforce Chicagoland's eroding racial barriers and further marginalize and separate themselves from poor Chicagoans and people of color.¹⁰

The seven historical societies considered in this dissertation all used “love of place” histories to claim authority over the local past and generate support for their projects. Carol Kammen, noted local history scholar, coined the term “love of place” in an August 2017 interview when she described why people working through local history groups, including local historical societies, write and share histories that “avoid or skirt around political topics” or “provoke divisiveness.” She explained, “The founders of a place and the way it was set up are celebrated in a way that leaves out diversity and controversy. The history comes out of a need to keep people there... [Which] makes it difficult for anyone to controvert the established narrative.” She continued, “the conventions of local history, it seems to me, are to make people... feel good about place.”¹¹ Historical society founders in Rogers Park and West Ridge,

¹⁰ The history of historical societies formed in the United States in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries is considered in chapter one of this project. The definition of “local” throughout this dissertation expands on the definition of local museums offered by Amy Levin in *Defining Memory*, 9. Levin writes, “In defining local museums, I decided to take the term *local* literally, as defining the primary emphasis of the museum’s collection or delineating the museums’ main audience.” Her definition applies to local historical societies, which also claim authority over history happening within a particular geographical space.

¹¹ Carol Kammen shared the term “love of place” with me in an August 2017 interview for the American Association for State and Local History. Kammen and I co-authored an article based on that interview titled “On Doing Local History: Local History, Politics, and the Public Good,” *History News* 73, No. 1 (Winter 2018). Significantly, Kammen did not equate “love of place” histories with those meant to evoke a sense of nostalgia, though the two certainly share some overlap. In *Defining Memory*, Amy Levin wrote, “For many small historical museums, nostalgia may be considered a kind of epistemology...[it] is a unique way of knowing that valorizes certain aspects of the past, endowing them with importance as truths” and, in *Mystic Chords of Memory* Michael Kammen argued, “There is nothing necessarily wrong with nostalgia per se, but more often than not the phenomenon does involve a pattern of highly selective memory.” In *Vanishing Eden*, Heather Dalmage and Michael Maly explained the connection between white ethnic nostalgia and racial change. White ethnics, they wrote, remember “favorable memories [about their homeplaces] while ignoring painful ones” in order to define what constitutes a “good neighborhood, community, and world.” “Love of place” histories can certainly trigger feelings of nostalgia, but they do so for reasons that set historical societies apart from other groups engaged in the exploration of local history. Michael Kammen, 619-626; Levin, 93; and Michael T. Maly and Heather Dalmage,

Glen Ellyn, Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, Hyde Park, South Shore, and Cicero wrote and used “love of place” histories to manage changes provoked by population migrations and build heritage barriers limiting outsider access to their towns and neighborhoods.¹² Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and Glen Ellyn Historical Society founders created definitions of local heritage that justified their efforts to protect their historic streetscapes from alterations proposed by developers during a time of significant population growth. People forming historical societies in Rogers Park and West Ridge, Hyde Park, and South Shore—all urban neighborhoods—employed “love of place” histories to, in Carol Kammen’s words, “keep people there” amid concerns about white population loss and racial demographic change. And the founders of the first Rogers Park Historical Society deployed heritage in support of efforts by local leaders to make Rogers Park a more attractive place to live for the area’s existing residents, while later historical society founders in Rogers Park and West Ridge, Hyde Park, South Shore, and Cicero used heritage to stake a claim for white and white ethnic people in neighborhoods whose residents struggled or outright refused to accept and accommodate poor people, black Chicagoans, Latino people, and new immigrants.¹³

This story unfolds across five chapters. In chapter one, I explore the history of historical societies formed before World War II to show what people who established historical societies after the war believed they could accomplish by joining this tradition. In chapters two, three, and

Vanishing Eden: White Construction of Memory, Meaning, and Identity in a Racially Changing City (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 91-93.

¹² I use Michael Kammen’s definition of heritage in this project. According to Kammen, heritage is “an alternative to history” that “accentuates the positive but sifts away what is problematic” (626). Historical society founders created heritage identities for their homeplaces and employed them to instill “love of place” among residents.

¹³ In *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), Dolores Hayden demonstrates how place and place-making shape public memory and how landscapes can reflect and reinforce ideas about race, gender, class, and identity in a given place.

four, I investigate why residents formed local historical societies in Rogers Park, West Ridge, Glen Ellyn, Cicero, Hyde Park, South Shore, Lake Forest, and Lake Bluff, the projects they undertook during their earliest years, and how they impacted life in their homeplaces. More specifically, I analyze the first Rogers Park Historical Society, the Glen Ellyn Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Cicero, which were all founded by residents concerned about the immediate fate of historical resources in their communities, in chapter two. In chapter three, I move on to the Hyde Park Historical Society and the second Rogers Park Historical Society—now the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society—where residents used their societies to explore white and white ethnic identity amid growing racial, ethnic, and economic pluralism. And in chapter four, I explore why residents formed the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and South Shore Historical Societies, which were both established in response to anxiety about new development, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse, and how each society shaped the sense of history conveyed by the local built environment. Finally, for chapter five, I interviewed representatives from the four organizations still in operation today—the Glen Ellyn Historical Society, the Hyde Park Historical Society, the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, and the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff (formerly historical society)—to talk about how they operate and effect local change today, as well as challenges facing each historical society in the new millennium.

People have long turned to the past for a sense of comfort and familiarity in turbulent times. As Gerber wrote in 1979, “...Time and again history seems to prove that...what is elemental survives” in the face of adversity.¹⁴ In that sense, this is an old story. People formed

¹⁴ Gerber, 216.

(and continue to form) local historical societies to locate a place for themselves and their families in an ever-changing world. But we also know that people have long mobilized history to shape political and social change in their communities. Black and Indigenous Americans, for example, have written and shared histories celebrating their history and culture as part of their effort to dismantle racial stereotypes and define and secure equal rights.¹⁵ And yet, despite the ubiquity of the local historical society, or maybe because of it, few scholars have attempted to analyze the ways people use local historical societies to mobilize the past.

It's far past time to do this work. Postwar historical society founders used their racial and economic privilege to claim, define, and represent history as it happened within particular geographic boundaries, and used the authority conferred by the title "historical society" to protect entrenched local interests and negotiate their own identities and privileges during a time of significant population and demographic change. Rising popular interest in history, as well as new financial resources available for people interested in heritage work, certainly contributed to the explosion in local historical society formation after World War II, but historical society founders did not limit their activities to a measured enthusiasm and appreciation for the past. Instead, they used their historical authority to influence conversations and decisions about the present and future of their towns and neighborhoods. They established access to local politicians and powerful local community councils, navigated the complex political processes underpinning local, state, and national historic preservation designations, fought developers changing their local streetscapes, and shaped laws and ordinances related to the natural and built environments. They mobilized the past to shape how change unfolded in

¹⁵ For more on tribal museums and their role in Indigenous advocacy efforts, see Meagan Donnelly McChesney, "Exhibiting Sovereignty: Tribal Museums in the Great Lakes Region, 1969-2010," (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2019).

their communities, and their efforts impacted, to varying extents, who could access and make changes to their homeplaces. Their story enriches our understanding of how Americans, and especially white Americans, responded to racial and economic change in the postwar metropolis, and they deserve more attention from scholars investigating heritage and inequality in Rust Belt cities.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, HISTORIANS, AND THE LOCAL HISTORY MOVEMENT

On May 23, 1968, twenty-seven residents from Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood gathered at their local Women's Club for the first meeting of the newly established Rogers Park Historical Society (RPHS). They began by discussing their failure to save the Sampson House, a one-hundred-year-old historic house located in Rogers Park and recently purchased by a developer who hoped to tear it down and replace it with an apartment building. The RPHS had hoped to acquire the building, move it to land owned by the Chicago Park District (CPD), and use it as the headquarters of their new society. The developer agreed to give them the house and subsidize its removal from the property, but their plans were foiled by "recent and consistent vandalism," which "wrecked the house beyond redemption," before they could move it to a new location. Though ultimately forced to "abandon plans for saving the Sampson House," they decided to form a new historical society anyway, and Wigoda "presented the group with an Official Charter...he had obtained from the state of Illinois, empowering the group to 'perpetuate and preserve historical sites, structures and memorabilia pertinent to the founding and progress of the area known as Rogers Park in the city of Chicago.'"¹

The founding members' decision to incorporate as a historical society to preserve Rogers Park's history demonstrates that they believed a historical society to be the best option for which

¹ Minutes of first Rogers Park Historical Society meeting, May 23, 1968, Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS) archives, Chicago, IL; and "Residents Seek Home for 100-year-old House," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1968, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, May 2018; Rogers Park is located in Chicago's 49th Ward on the city's far north side.

to do this work. By that point, historical societies at the state, regional, and local level had existed in the United States for over 160 years and had a long and storied history of their own. Historical societies forming in the decades after World War II, like the Rogers Park Historical Society, possessed a rich tradition from which to draw and looked to the older societies for guidance in how to move forward. In the Chicago metropolitan area alone, at least eighteen historical societies existed by the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, and at least thirty-five formed in the two decades between the war and the Rogers Park Historical Society's formation in 1968. At the first meeting of the RPHS, acting secretary Rene Sutor noted that she read about "structural formation and formal membership" in "a book on the subject from the Chicago Historical Society" and representative Elward, also present at the meeting, added that the "Illinois State Historical Society also has a book on the subject." Sutor and Lily Venson "agreed to investigate both and report on same at next [RPHS] meeting." The data shared in *A Look at Ourselves*, Clement M. Silvestro and Richmond D. Williams' 1962 publication for the American Association for State and Local History—the "ourselves" being local history organizations—also reflects this growing connection between state and local groups. Silvestro and Williams wrote, "The [state] sponsorship of workshops for local societies had become increasingly popular" and "state agencies" and "local societies" were communicating much more than they did before.²

² See Appendix A for a list of historical societies founded in the Chicago metropolitan area over the past two centuries. The Rogers Park Historical Society founded in 1968 is not the same group as the current Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, which came out of a later attempt to establish a local historical society in Rogers Park after the initial effort failed. The second RPHS changed its name to the RP/WRHS in the mid-1990s to reflect a commitment to West Ridge as well as Rogers Park. The first RPHS is considered further in chapter 2 of this project and the second RPHS/RP/WRHS is explored in chapter 3. Minutes of first Rogers Park Historical Society meeting; and Clement M. Silvestro and Richmond D. Williams, *A Look at Ourselves* (American Association for State and Local History, 1962), 422-423.

This chapter explores the history of historical societies founded before World War II to help establish what people in the postwar era, like the residents from Rogers Park, understood a historical society to be and what they believed they could achieve by joining this tradition. Additionally, much of the existing literature about historical society purpose and function focuses on those founded between the 1790s and the 1940s. This chapter provides context for historical societies founded after 1945 by presenting an overview of prewar historical society history. In so doing, it attempts to better connect the histories of pre- and post-war historical societies, as well as demonstrate how postwar historical societies both adopted earlier traditions and broke the mold. Ultimately, the role historical societies played in the historical enterprise in the United States changed significantly between the founding of the first historical society in the United States in 1791 and the outbreak of World War II. Once reserved for affluent and well-connected white men, by the early twentieth century historical societies—and local historical societies in particular—had morphed into forums for popular historical inquiry. And by mid-century, Americans began to form local historical societies in record numbers, using them to engage directly with the past in the places where they lived and worked.

The First State and Local Historical Societies

Jeremy Belknap founded the Massachusetts Historical Society—the first historical society in the United States—in Boston, Massachusetts in 1791. Other history enthusiasts quickly followed, and state and local historical societies abounded across the United States by the time the nineteenth century ended a century later. Well-educated white men from well-known families generally founded and led these organizations, leveraging their extensive personal and professional networks to support their efforts to collect papers and objects produced and used by other prominent American men. Men affiliated with these organizations used their networks and,

in some cases, relationships with state authorities, to monopolize American historical narratives, creating a historical tradition for the United States committed to celebrating American progress and achievement.

The Massachusetts Historical Society was the first organization founded in what would become a nationwide network of state historical societies. By the time he founded the MHS, Jeremy Belknap was known as “a leader in the society, literary, educational, and civic life of [his]...community,” and had earned “a reputation for keen interest and sound judgment in public affairs.” In his paper commemorating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Samuel A. Eliot referred to Belknap as an “ardent leader of the patriot cause” during the Revolutionary War, and explained how “the Massachusetts convention which debated and finally ratified the Federal Constitution met in the Long Lane Meetinghouse,” where Belknap held the ministry after returning to Boston. Born in Boston in 1744, Belknap trained for the Congregational ministry and “was called to the pulpit” in Dover, New Hampshire in 1767. He spent almost twenty years in Dover, during which time he researched and wrote a history of the state of New Hampshire, before returning to Boston in 1786.³

Belknap’s interest in the civic health of the young nation included concern for its history. In addition to being born into a family with “puritan heritage, which placed a transcendent value on the study of human history,” he studied European history at Harvard College and was likely influenced and inspired by the “Reverend Thomas Prince, his minister at the Old South Church

³ Samuel A. Eliot was great-great nephew to Belknap’s wife, Ruth Eliot, as well as a minister at the Boston church where Belknap once served. Samuel A. Eliot, “Jeremy Belknap: A Paper in Recognition of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Massachusetts Historical Society” in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 66 (1942), 97-98; and H.G. Jones, *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill NC: North Caroliniana Society, Inc. and North Caroline Collection, 1995), 1.

and one of colonial New England's most accomplished historians." Belknap believed, perhaps as a result of his experience writing a history of New Hampshire, that there needed to be some kind of official or standardized system for storing historical materials. To exemplify his point, he explained how he searched for sources "in the garrets and rat-holes of old houses," and said "I am willing even to scrape a dunghill if I may find a jewel at the bottom." Belknap worried that the lack of official repositories for historical materials hampered historians trying to research and write about American history, which he feared would result in the loss of critical information about the past. Even libraries and other learned societies in existence at the time—and there were few—did not collect "primary historical materials." He expressed his fear in a letter to John Adams in 1789, writing, "The want of public repositories for historical materials as well as the destruction of many valuable ones by fire, by war and by the lapse of time has long been a subject of regret in my mind. Many papers which are daily thrown away may in future be much wanted, but except here and there a person who has a curiosity of his own to gratify, no one cares to undertake the collection..." Belknap hoped to establish an organization committed to the collection of historical documents and artifacts to help ensure their protection from loss due to apathy or accident.⁴

Belknap originally hoped to establish some kind of historical library in cooperation with Harvard College but, despite several attempts between 1774 and 1787, the plans never led to any

⁴ Jones, 2-3; Libraries open at the time included the Kings Chapel Library, sent by King William II to Kings Chapel in Boston in 1698 (Jones, 25), and "the Library Company of Philadelphia...the Library Company of Charleston, South Carolina; and the New York Society Library. Even in New England... there were only three libraries of note: the Harvard and Yale College libraries, used almost entirely by the students and faculty, and the Redwood Library in Newport, Rhode Island" (Jones, 2). Included among the learned societies were the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, to which Belknap was added as an "honorary member" in 1784. See Louis Leonard Tucker, *Clio's Consort: Jeremy Belknap and the Founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1990), footnote 60 on 28.

decisive action. As a result, Belknap decided instead to “establish an independent organization, a ‘Society of Antiquarians’” dedicated to the study and collection of materials related to the history of colonial America and the United States. Learned societies dedicated to literary pursuits and historical collections and study had existed for a long time outside of the United States. Indeed, some scholars argue that the roots of historical societies can be found as far back as the millennia before Christ in the “magi of Persia, the stargazers of Babylon and Chaldea, [and] the Celtic Druids” as well as “Plato, Varro, and Tully as the founders of important historical associations and the Pontifical Society of Archaeology at Rome as the oldest historical society in Europe.” The European tradition was firmly established by 1572, when the Society of Antiquarians of London opened. The *Petite Academie*, known today as the *Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, followed in Paris in 1663; the *Real Academia de Buena Letras de Barcelona* in 1727; the *Real Academia de la Historia* in Madrid in 1738; and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780.⁵

Belknap and founding members of other early historical societies likely modeled their institutions on these older organizations. The New York Historical Society, for example, established in 1804, referenced the “proven utility of learned societies in Europe” in its inaugural year and founding member John Pintard stated “he hoped the library of the New York Historical Society would become of value to scholars ‘like the extensive Libraries of the Old World.’”

⁵ Already in existence at the time were “the nation’s two learned societies—the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston...” But they “focused on discussions and publications, not on developing a library. They were designed to further ‘practical and useful knowledge’ ... Their principal interest was natural science, not history” See Jones, 2.; Jones 4-5.; Leslie Dunlap, “American Historical Societies, 1790-1860” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1944), 6; and Scholarly Societies Project, “Academie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20060310235218/http://www.scholarly-societies.org/history/1663aribl.html>, accessed October 2018.

American Antiquarian Society (AAS) founder Isaiah Thomas was similarly “acquainted with European and Indian historical societies,” which were “recognized as an important factor in the formation” of the AAS in 1812. Additionally, Belknap was a well-connected man who “was closely attuned to British cultural affairs” and was most certainly aware of the existence of the Society of Antiquaries of London, which “was well-known throughout Great Britain.”⁶

Dozens of state and, to a lesser extent, local historical societies formed in the wake of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New York Historical Society, and the American Antiquarian Society. State organizations emerged across the country, from Alabama and South Carolina to Illinois and Wisconsin, to ensure the active collection and study of historical materials from areas around the United States. Historical societies provided a place for men—and founders of these early organizations almost always limited their membership to white men “of education and talent...often...persons of prominence”—to convene and discuss the past. Society members wrote to counterparts at societies in other parts of the United States to share ideas and historical information, and members of some of the older societies along the Atlantic seaboard sometimes advised men building new historical societies in younger states formed as Americans continued to invade and occupy indigenous land. Some maintained active correspondence in order to establish a kind of historical network, which led to cross-national attempts to work together on joint projects like *The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, which ran from 1857 to 1875.⁷

⁶ Dunlap, 7-8; Jones, 5; John Pintard to Eliza Noel Davidson, January 27, 1818, “Letters from John Pintard...I,” *Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1937*, LXX (1940), 107; “About,” American Antiquarian Society, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/about>, accessed November 2019.

⁷ Dunlap, 24-27, 119-121.

Founders and members of these early historical societies did not always limit their collecting scope to materials related to the history of their respective states. For example, the Chicago Historical Society (CHS), founded in 1856, collected materials related to the “great Northwest,” not just Chicago, and some of the early historical societies even included national history in their scope, though “the area of concentration was [eventually] defined for some of the later organizations.” Isaiah Thomas focused on “the origins of the New World...the Western Hemisphere captured his attention and especially his native land” at the American Antiquarian Society. The Staten Island Historical Society even worked to “promote Scientific and other Knowledge by means of Lectures upon Scientific and Literary Subjects,” and the Massachusetts Historical Society included natural history in its original purview. Interestingly, despite the varied scopes, “few [early] societies were organized to conduct [genealogical] investigations”—a stark contrast to local historical societies founded in the twentieth century.⁸

Scope aside, historical society members collected materials because they wanted to support historians constructing a historical tradition in the United States. Early society membership policies reflected their focus on collecting. At first, society founders restricted membership to a select number of people they could call on to, as in the case of the AAS, search for and “donate articles of value to the collections at least once a year.” AAS leadership, for example, asked members to find materials relevant to their organizational mission and send them back to the AAS for inclusion in their collections. Historical society leaders tended to favor well-connected men whose clout they could rely on to build their influence and secure historical collections produced by political and social leaders, which resulted in the construction of

⁸ Tucker, *Clio's Consort*, 18; and Dunlap, 17-20.

archives and histories celebrating quintessential great white men. They tended to relax membership restrictions more over time, but generally continued to favor educated men from upper-middle and upper-class families.⁹

In addition to collecting private papers, many state historical societies collected records produced by their state governments. These societies were sometimes established by state legislators and “in close relationship to their state governments,” which made them “legally...institutions of public benefit.” In some cases, state governments provided their historical societies with financial and other types of support. For example, the New Hampshire Historical Society “in its early years...occupied rooms in the capitol and in 1847 the Missouri Historical and Philosophical Society was permitted to do likewise.” Historical societies would often, in turn, attempt to shape and direct “activities of public importance,” like when the Historical Society of Pennsylvania helped “in securing the passage of an act which required registration of births, marriages, and deaths.” This arrangement helped facilitate the transfer and sharing of public records between state agencies and historical societies, turning these societies into important repositories of public records.¹⁰

Historical societies formed during the first decades of the new republic also included groups committed to local history. The first formed as early as 1821, when a group of Essex County residents petitioned the state of Massachusetts to allow them to incorporate the Essex

⁹ The AAS “placed a greater emphasis on source materials produced by the ‘common’ citizen’...,” but the AAS approach was an exception to the norm. See Tucker, 16. Dunlap also described the characteristics of people involved in historical societies in his “American Historical Societies, 1790-1860,” 22-47.; Tucker, *Clio’s Consort*, 16, 18; Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 8, 13, 23.

¹⁰ Dunlap, 15, 48-59. Dunlap cites Hampton Carson, *A History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Published by the Society, 1940), I, 238.

Historical Society, later re-formed into the Essex Institute when it merged with the Essex County Natural History Society in 1848. The founders declared “the object of the society...[to be] to procure and preserve whatever relates to the topography, antiquities, and natural, civil and ecclesiastical history of the county of Essex.” The Ulster Historical Society, now the Ulster County Historical Society, formed in New York State in 1859 and, along with the Rochester Historical Society, included “the collection and compilation of genealogical tables in their statement of aims...”—a commitment no state historical societies made at that time. The Litchfield Historical and Antiquarian Society, founded in Connecticut in 1856, also “proposed as a proper object for the association the preparation of ‘faithful genealogical tables’,” in addition to the more typical mission to “discover, procure and preserve whatever may relate to civil, military, literary and ecclesiastical history and biography in general and of the County of Litchfield in the State of Connecticut in particular...” Local groups, like their state counterparts, tended to collect materials produced by influential white men, but did so within a more confined geographical area.¹¹

Local and state historical society members often interacted with each other. In some cases, like in Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York, state-level historical societies explored creating affiliated local “subordinate agencies” to ensure as broad a coverage as possible within their respective states. The New Jersey Historical Society, for example, “voted to

¹¹ Essex Historical Society, *Essex Historical Society Petition for Incorporation* (Essex, MA, 1821), 2, accessed via Google Books at <https://books.google.com/books?id=sH59Mw7t2VwC&lpg=PA5&dq=essex%20historical%20society%20maine&pg=PT4#v=onepage&q=essex%20historical%20society%20maine&f=false>; “Litchfield Historical Society,” <http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/>; Litchfield Historical Society, “Constitution and by-laws of the Litchfield Historical Society,” (Litchfield, CT, 1914), 2, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t1kh0st8n;view=1up;seq=7>; and “Ulster County Historical Society,” <http://ulstercountyhs.org/history/ulster-county-historical-society/>; all accessed January 2018; Dunlap, 19, quoting G.H. Hollister, *Introductory Address...* (Hartford: press of Case, Tiffany and Company, 1856), 14; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 160; and Whitehill, 353.

encourage the establishment of units to collect local records, which were to be reported annually to the state association.” Some voiced concern about the possibility of competition between local and state societies, but “there appears to have been no reason for the concern of state societies about the rivalry of local institutions.” Members of local institutions seemed more interested in being useful to, rather than in competition with, state groups. For example, a local historical society in Connecticut viewed its purpose in relation to its state historical society as one of “an auxiliary of that excellent institution,” and other state groups felt partner groups collecting at the local level could help, not hinder, their own collecting efforts.¹²

The appearance of the first historical societies and the rapid spread of this model across the United States throughout the nineteenth century indicates that “the interest in the growth of the American nation was sufficiently strong and widespread to cause men in all sections of the country to seek historical records” to preserve for posterity. Establishing and working through state and local historical societies provided a way for well-resourced men to collect historical materials at a time when few archival repositories existed. Indeed, “a basic reason for the establishment of the first sixty-five historical societies in the United States was the realization that action was necessary to preserve historical records [because] their destruction was apparent everywhere.” In the end, their collective influence and, in some cases, attachment to the state, helped them secure and maintain a monopoly over official understandings of the American past in ways that reinforced their own power and influence. They collected materials generated by well-known American men, and excluded the histories and bodies of women, black Americans and other people of color, poorer whites, and indigenous Americans from the historical

¹² Dunlap, 45-46.

enterprise they created. The people excluded from historical societies maintained their own important historical traditions, but these were devalued and rejected by historical society founders and members who believed great white men shaped the most important elements of the American story.¹³

Professionalizing the Historical Discipline

An emerging popular interest in history, tradition, and memory in the second half of the nineteenth century brought dramatic changes to the role played by state and local historical societies in the United States. Before about 1860, “few Americans had given any thought to the need, not only to preserve historic documents, but to transform chimerical wisps of memory into enduring form...”¹⁴ But this changed by mid-century, by which time Americans had begun using history and “historical comparisons” between past and present to exemplify national progress and “as a means to justify American nationalism,” as well as “enhance their appreciation of the present.” They used history to satisfy their nascent “hunger for tradition” and construct a “Tradition of Progress” in the United States, holding, for example, “big expositions...with rhythmic regularity between 1876 and 1915” to solidify these ideas in civic memory and imagination.¹⁵

The surge in interest in memory, history, and tradition led to greater protections for and interest in historical materials, as well as to the proliferation of new organizations committed to historical inquiry. For example, the United States federal government made little effort to

¹³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹⁵ Ibid., 99-100, 132-136; and Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 3.

maintain historical records in any systematic way before finally giving the Library of Congress “a proper home” in the last decade of the nineteenth century and establishing a national archive in the 1930s. Private individuals contributed to this phenomenon as well. Wealthy inheritors of industrial wealth began to establish and affiliate themselves with intellectual and cultural centers like “libraries, museums, universities, and, most broadly, with incredible collections of civilization’s treasures.” Immigrant historical societies, hereditary organizations committed to heritage and American identity, a new cohort of authors writing about the past, and an emerging cadre of professional university-trained historians—the first to be trained as such—also began to engage more intently with the American past. Ultimately, the proliferation of places and organizations in which people engaged with the historical enterprise complicated the foundation of historical knowledge built up by state and local historical societies over the previous century and challenged the supremacy of the “non-professional” historians who had heretofore held a monopoly over the United States’ official historical record.¹⁶

The first hereditary societies formed in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely in response to broader national conversations about what it meant to be American in an era defined by nativism. Included among them were the Sons of the Revolution, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Colonial Dames of America, founded in 1876, 1890, and 1890, respectively, as well as “the Children of the Revolution [which] matured into their own organization in 1895,” “the Mayflower Descendants [who]

¹⁶ Dunlap 77, 157; In *Clio’s Consort*, Tucker uses the word “non-professional” to describe historians working with historical societies, who were generally not trained in the professional university programs emerging during the Progressive era (242). Ian Tyrell explains that the process of professionalization in the historical discipline occurred at different times in different regions of the United States. In the south, for example, “academic history made little headway until the 1920s, with popular consciousness of history driven by southern patriotic and hereditary societies...” See Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 213.

banded together two years later” and “the Huguenot Society and the Holland Society [which] had existed since 1883 and 1885, respectively.” Members of these groups feared newcomers immigrating to the United States from the “parts of Europe lacking the traditions of those stocks which settled the original thirteen states of the Union” would somehow dilute what they considered to be true American identity and culture. To set themselves apart, hereditary society founders celebrated their own Anglo-centric heritage and honored people who could prove a connection to “American beginnings.” Hereditary societies, unsurprisingly, encouraged genealogical exploration and were “intensely preoccupied” with such efforts.¹⁷

More established immigrant families and their descendants reacted to nativist sentiment by forming ethnic historical societies to “distinguish...themselves... [from the] more recent arrivals,” as well as to preserve their own ethnic traditions as the first members of their communities to immigrate to the United States began to pass away. John Appel, a historian and expert on immigrant historical societies, defined such a group as “an association having as one of its major objectives the promotion of immigrant history and the collection, study and publication of historical data related to the members of its group in what is today the United States of America.” They “took pride in their past and formed historical societies to record their ethnic history,” where they worked to complicate Anglo-centric versions of the American past and define a place for themselves in United States history.¹⁸

¹⁷ John Appel, “Immigrant Historical Societies in the United States, 1880-1950” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 18-21; and David A. Gerber, “Local and Community History: Some Cautionary Remarks on an Idea Whose Time Has Returned,” originally printed in *The History Teacher* 13 (1979) and reprinted in *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, edited by Carol Kammen (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 217.

¹⁸ Appel, 1, 6-7, 21; and Tyrrell, 29; Ethnic groups forming historical societies included, for example, Scotch-Irish, Irish, Jewish, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Italian, Polish, and Swiss immigrants and their descendants. See Appel, 25, 182, 271, 324, and 378.

The rise in popular interest in history also led to the emergence of authors writing about historical topics for popular audiences. The desire for such material was further fueled by the rise of a “public culture” in the United States, a phenomenon resulting from increased interconnectedness between different regions of the country due to faster modes of travel and communication and from increased literacy rates and improved access to literary material. The demand for non-fiction works, including non-fiction works about history, increased steadily until World War I, when it spiked “due to ‘concern with fact, information, opinion, argument, and history which began with the approach to the crisis of the war as far back as 1910.’” This interest in history as a mechanism by which to understand contemporary issues continued through the depression and into World War II and was supported by New Deal initiatives “highlighting the traditions of America.” So important was history to understanding crisis that from “1930 to 1933 history publishing rose by 8 percent and was the only field to expand” during the worst years of the Great Depression.¹⁹

The historical discipline also began to professionalize in the late nineteenth century. In the little more than a century of United States history before about 1900, historians had tended to be “men of wealth and prestige, ‘patrician’ leaders of society” working as “free lancers” or affiliated “with one of the historical societies devoted to state, regional, or local historical investigations.” That changed in the late nineteenth century when universities began offering professional training programs for historians at the doctoral level and hiring professional historians to teach in their history degree programs. Individuals attending these programs graduated with a different set of skills than the ones honed for decades by their non-professional

¹⁹ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 96-100, 158; and Tyrrell, 46-48.

counterparts. The non-professional set believed history to be “a branch of literature,” but professionally trained historians defined history as ““a science whose practitioners marshaled and classified data and published monographs modeled after the laboratory report of the natural scientist.”” They believed historical inquiry, as a scientific endeavor, “must be rigidly factual and empirical...scrupulously neutral” which, “if systematically pursued...might ultimately produce a comprehensive, ‘definitive’ history.” The new “scientific history” taught in universities set professional historians apart and marked the beginning of a new kind of historical thinking.²⁰

The gulf between professional and non-professional historians widened over time. In 1884, at a meeting of the American Social Science Association, a group of historians decided to form a new professional organization dedicated to the pursuit of historical knowledge and practice. The impetus for the formation of the new group, incorporated as the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1889, came from the professionalization of history in the academy, though the long tradition established by historical societies provided the initial foundation. Historian Julian Boyd wrote in 1934 that the AHA “is at least the product of their activity. The existing societies in 1884 not only contributed many of the members of the new national organization, but their combined activities in...the study of history...had made such an organization possible...” The AHA’s founding members, like Herbert Baxter Adams of The Johns Hopkins University, generally recognized ““the importance of...[historical] associations of men and money”” and, as a result, “took special care to involve the non-professionals in the

²⁰ Louis Leonard Tucker, *The Massachusetts Historical Society: A Bicentennial History* (Boston, MA: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1995), 240, quoting David Van Tassell in *Recording America’s Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37, and Tyrrell, 9, 47-48, 209-210. Rebecca Conard offers a particularly comprehensive overview of the professionalization of the historical discipline in *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History*.

American Historical Association.” Despite this acknowledgement though, some professional historians dismissed non-professionals and their work, including Adams, who “maintained an attitude of superiority toward [so-called] amateur historians.”²¹

Amid these changes, women and people of color created, discussed, and shaped the discipline and worked to carve out their own space in the historical sphere. White men doing historical work in both professional and non-professional settings discriminated against women, black Americans, and other non-white historians, and questioned their ability to create and disseminate historical knowledge. Women were present in university history departments from the earliest days of professionalization and continuously pushed against constant efforts by male historians to marginalize them and dismiss their work. For example, historian Angie Debo was “a noted authority on...[American Indian peoples] and author of nine books, trained as an academic, but like many women, could not get an academic job even though her *Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (1934) won the AHA’s Dunning Prize.” In response, a group of women historians formed the “Lakeville Conference,” now known as the Berkshire conference, in 1930 to provide a space for academic exchange and “camaraderie among marginalized academic woman historians.” Women also “persistently lobbied the AHA in the 1930s for space for women historians on the annual program and for executive and committee positions within the association.” The same “gender patterns” permeated communities of professional writers: “few

²¹ “Brief History of the AHA,” <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/brief-history-of-the-aha>, accessed February 2018; Tucker, *Clio’s Consort*, 242; Julian Boyd, “State and Local Historical Societies in the United States,” *American Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (1934), 26. Boyd was a Professor of History at Princeton and the President of the American Historical Association in 1964. See “Julian P. Boyd Presidential Address” for the American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/julian-p-boyd> and “Julian P. Boyd biography,” American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/julian-p-boyd/julian-p-boyd-biography> for more. Both accessed April 2018.

of these nationally prominent writers were women... Women writers tended to congregate in the local historical societies or wrote biography and historical novels.” Male historians devalued women’s work, which tended toward “social and cultural issues” more than the political and economic history valued so highly by their male counterparts, and actively marginalized women’s roles in the historical profession and other areas of historical work.²²

White historians also discriminated against and marginalized black historians and degraded and misrepresented black history. The desire to reconcile north and south in the decades after the Civil War trumped Reconstruction-Era attempts to incorporate black history fully into the nation’s “retrospective consciousness,” resulting in the exclusion of black voices and critical understandings of black history from “mainstream” historical narratives. Despite the ever-present threat of white violence, black Americans mobilized their own pasts in the interest of advancing knowledge about black history, in part to fuel black pride, combat dangerous racial stereotypes and inform and advance dialogue and action related to civil rights. To this end, black historians organized scholarly organizations like the Reading Room Society in Philadelphia, founded in 1828 “to demonstrate the historical and literary achievements of African Americans.” They also launched groups like the American Negro Historical Society in Philadelphia in 1892, the American Negro Academy in 1897, the Negro Society for Historical Research in 1911, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH)—now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History—in 1915 to encourage scholarly engagement with black history.²³

²² Tyrell, 29, 50-51.

²³ Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, 121, 125; James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-Americans and Museums: Toward a Policy of Inclusion,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 217-218; Spencer R. Crew, “African Americans, History and Museums: Preserving African American History in the Public Arena,” in Gaynor Kavanagh,

Efforts by black historians to share black history affected local history as well. According to historian Andrea Burns, black Americans founded “churches, benevolent associations, and improvement and literary societies,” committed to the celebration and dissemination of black history and culture. The ASNLH, led at that time by Harvard-trained historian Carter Woodson, connected with black Americans on the local and regional levels—a strategy that helped ASNLH leadership spread information about ASNLH initiatives, like "Negro History Week," to people across the United States. The ASNLH and other professional groups committed to black history supported historical inquiry led by "middle-class, black social workers, public schoolteachers, librarians, union activists, church clergy and laity, fraternity and sorority members, and clubwomen...[who] engaged with the uplift tradition promoted by Woodson and helped build various regional organizations in many American cities from Atlanta to Chicago." These efforts included black women, who worked to cultivate and spread the "black history movement across America." Carter Woodson "frequently praised" the black women who, as ASNLH "field representatives," established connections with local communities to ensure adoption of ASNLH initiatives on the regional and local levels.²⁴

By the early twentieth century, state and local historical societies were no longer the most visible forums for historical inquiry in the United States. People founding and joining hereditary

ed., *Making Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 80-81; Walter B. Hill, Jr., “Institutions of Memory and the Documentation of African Americans in Federal Records,” *Prologue: Special Issue: Federal Records and African American History* 29 no. 2 (1997), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/institutions-of-memory.html>, accessed October 2018; Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 1-5; and Ian Rocksborough-Smith, *Black Public History in Chicago: Civil Rights Activism from World War II Into the Cold War* (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 10-11. For more on reconciliation between north and south and the impact this had on black Americans, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 122-123, 441; Burns, 7-8; Rocksborough-Smith, 10-11; and Crew, 81.

societies and ethnic historical societies, popular authors, and professional historians, including women and black Americans, popularized new ways to produce and share history. Their research complicated historical narratives established by state and local historical societies founded by men like Jeremy Belknap in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, undermining the authority these men claimed over the historical record.

The Changing Role of Non-Professional Historians

Professionalization brought significant changes to the role non-professional historians played in the historical discipline. While professional historians applauded the work done by non-professionals in the century since Belknap established the Massachusetts Historical Society, they questioned the validity and usefulness of non-professional work in comparison to their own. Professional attempts to impose standards on non-professional work, as well as to devalue history work done outside professional parameters, created a new kind of hierarchy in historical practice. Professional male historians—the new historical authorities—occupied the top tier and relegated non-professional historians and the state and local historical societies where they worked to the outskirts of the discipline.

Professional historians understood the important role state and local historical societies played in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Historical societies founders and members managed the nation's historical resources before universities were equipped and willing to do so, "pioneered the development of both history and nature museums...built libraries, archives, and manuscript collections, and...started some of the nation's outstanding art collections." Julian Boyd explained, "For nearly a century before the founding of the American Historical Association these state and local societies provided almost the sole channels for effective promotion of historical study in the United States." Professional historians also valued local

history as source material for their attempts to piece together a single, comprehensive national narrative—“like a jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces would be steadily recovered to produce a total picture of the past...” Indeed, interest in state and local history was high enough that American Historical Association members formed the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies—now the American Association for State and Local History—in 1904. Local and state historical societies saved materials dating to earlier centuries, and professional historians understood the value of these sources to their work.²⁵

Despite their appreciation for eighteenth and nineteenth century non-professional historians and historical societies, most professional historians did not trust their non-professional counterparts to produce rigorous or accurate scholarship. In 1934, reflecting on changes to the discipline since the late nineteenth century, Boyd wrote “...if the rise of the scientific method in the last century brought discontent with the standards of historical societies, it also brought a keen sense of the value of local history.” He continued: “the early reports of the American Historical Association contain much criticism of the work and publications of local historians and local historical societies, no less justifiable than it was sometimes scathing.” Boyd himself held mixed feelings, saying “equally divergent viewpoints may be adopted toward the work of state and local historical societies: one may measure it by high standards of scholarship and find much of it defective, or one may compare it with a void and be grateful that so much has been done.” Professional historians valued local history but questioned the value of scholarship produced by non-professionals, a group that included men like Amos Everett Jewett, a “walking repository of local information and [one of the] mainstays of [his]...local historical

²⁵ Jones, viii; Tyrrell, 27; Boyd, 11; and Frederick Wightman Moore, “First Report of the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies,” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 6 no. 3 (1905), 318-319.

society.” Professional historians marginalized historical societies, and especially local groups, creating a “clear hierarchy that placed local history at the bottom in terms of its ultimate utility for the building of the nation.” Given this tension, it is perhaps unsurprising that professional male historians considered local historical societies to be a fitting place for female historians, both non-professional and professionally trained.²⁶

Now that history had professionalized and found a place in universities, libraries, and museums, historical societies, and local historical societies in particular, occupied a very different place in the American historical tradition. State historical societies fell along a spectrum in-between professional settings and local historical societies, and many professional historians found employment in these organizations. But professional historians moved local historical societies firmly into the amateur category, and as the twentieth century unfolded, these organizations underwent changes that set them even further apart from the professional side of the discipline.

“The Local Historical Society Movement”²⁷

The increasing amateurization of local historical societies corresponded to and was bolstered by the surge in popular historical interest in historical work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By this time, state and local historical societies were more accessible than ever before. Minnesota historian Theodore Blegen told historians gathered at the 1928 Mississippi Valley Historical Association annual meeting that the rise in popular interest accounted for “rapidly increasing membership of state [historical] societies,” and noted the “growth in appreciation among public officials and legislators of the value of the work of such

²⁶ Boyd, 10-11; and Whitehill, 211, 361.

²⁷ Theodore C. Blegen, “State Historical Agencies and the Public,” *Minnesota History* 9 no. 2 (1928): 128.

societies.” Local historical societies especially were seen by white Americans in particular as forums through which they could engage directly with the local past. They founded local historical societies in record numbers across the United States in response to a desire to explore local history, “celebrate community centennials,” pursue “the preservation of a house” or “way of life,” organize “commemoration[s] of...historic events,” or for “the attraction of tourists.” Blegen explained how local historical societies did “much in the collection of records, the writing of local history, the erection of markers, and the general promotion of historical work.” He also reported on the increase in local historical societies, exemplifying his point by describing a “crop of newly organized county historical societies [that] had emerged” in Minnesota in response to the “growth of historical interest in that state.” “The local historical society movement,” as he called it, had spread across much of the United States by that time.²⁸

New programs and initiatives offered by historical societies reflected increased popular interest in and direct engagement with the past. Blegen, for example, noted how people donated “family papers and diaries” to the Minnesota Historical Society in response to historically themed radio programs. Similar kinds of radio programs ran in Iowa and Missouri around the same time. Blegen also reported that “many state historical societies have actively interested themselves in the promotion of historical marking and the progress of that movement in the last fifteen or twenty years” as more Americans purchased “automobile[s] and [took advantage of] the rapid improvement of highways.” In Indiana, the state historical society decided to redesign a major commemorative pageant to better accommodate and “arouse the interest of people not only in Indiana but throughout the whole country.” The same group recorded a “rapid increase in

²⁸ Ibid., 123-124, 128; and Silvestro and Williams, 433.

the last five years in the number of [genealogical and historical] inquiries received by the [local] societies.”²⁹

Professional historians knew about and celebrated the broader popularization of history, as well as increased public engagement with state and local historical societies. They discussed how professional historians might support popular historical interest, but disagreements about what this could look like in practice stymied any real progress toward this goal. Still, some professional historians worked with popular audiences by joining local historical societies as board members and advisors, though they were careful to maintain the distinction between professional and non-professional historical work. In 1905, for example, in Monroe County, Indiana, Professor S.B. Harding, from Indiana University, and Minnie Ellis, a history teacher, joined the Monroe County Historical Society’s board of directors. Though they shared papers and research of “local interest” with historical society members, they maintained their professional affiliations with a university and high school, respectively. Many professional historians continued to question the utility of scholarship produced by non-professional historians. Blegen agreed, stating that state historical societies should “take further steps toward the improvement of local historical writing...” by creating a “manual or guide in local historical investigation for beginners.” He acknowledged that “many local historians might resent attempts to insist upon technical scholarship,” but argued “it is highly probably that most would welcome some aid in fundamentals, especially if offered in so unobtrusive a way.” Many professional historians supported local historical societies but devalued historical work done by non-

²⁹ Blegen, 129-131.

professionals in local settings.³⁰

Ultimately, local historical societies proliferated in the United States in the early twentieth century in part because their amateurization made them more accessible to non-professionals interested in the local past. As a result, people founding local historical societies in the early twentieth century tended to adopt a much more hyper-local focus than their nineteenth century predecessors. Older local historical societies often collected materials relating to an entire county or even multiple counties or regions. The Ulster Historical Society, for example, founded in 1859 in Kingston, NY, “made several counties the subject of their studies.” Others were local in name only, like the Historical Society of Pittsburgh, which collected materials related to “the history of the entire country,” and the Chicago Historical Society, which “undertook to gather records of the great Northwest.” In contrast, people forming local historical societies after about 1900 tended to take a much narrower approach, focusing instead on the history of the single municipality or neighborhood where they lived instead of a larger region or county. This was rare before the turn of the century, and the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, now the Dorchester Historical Society, founded in 1843, is one of only a few examples of an older local historical society dedicated specifically to the history of a single municipality. But people forming local historical societies in the twentieth century almost always did so to explore history in their specific homeplaces.³¹

Charles Crittenden and Doris Godard confirmed the increase in the number of local historical societies when they released their co-authored handbooks about historical societies in

³⁰ “Local Historical Societies,” *The Indiana Quarterly Magazine of History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1905), 102; Blegen, 132-133; and Tyrrell, 52-54.

³¹ Ulster County Historical Society;” Dunlap, 18; and “About Us,” Dorchester Historical Society, <http://www.dorchesterhistoricalsociety.org/index.php/about-us>, accessed November 2019.

the United States and Canada in 1936. According to them, 583 “historical organizations [existed] in the two countries by 1936.” They published another volume in 1944, reporting an increase to 904 organizations— “an increase of 56 per cent” in just eight years. So significant was the rise in interest in local history by mid-century that the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies, formed as part of the AHA in 1904, decided to break from the AHA and form an entirely separate legal entity dedicated to state and local history. The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) was born in 1941, reflecting the growing popular interest in local history and local history organizations.³²

Local Historical Societies in the Chicago Metropolis

Local historical societies proliferated across the Chicago metropolis during the first half of the twentieth century, exemplifying the phenomenon described by Crittenden and Godard. Historical societies had existed in Chicago since the formation of the Chicago Historical Society (CHS, now the Chicago History Museum), in 1856. CHS founders vowed “to collect and preserve the memorials of its founders and benefactors, as well as the historical evidence of its progress in settlement and population, and in the arts, improvements and institutions which distinguish a civilized community, [and] to transmit the same for the instruction and benefit of future generations.” Though founded in and named after Chicago, CHS was not committed solely to Chicago’s local historical society. Typical to many older historical societies, CHS members collected material from the surrounding region—in Chicago’s case, the Northwest

³² Charles C. Crittenden and Doris Godard, *Historical Societies in the United States and Canada: a handbook* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for State and Local History, 1944), V. Crittenden authored the 1936 edition, which was published by the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies before the group left the AHA and founded the American Association for State and Local History in 1941; and American Association for State and Local History, “History of the Association,” *State and Local History News* 1 no. 1 (1941), 4. Crittenden chaired the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies when its leadership decided to form AASLH and served as AASLH’s first president.

portion of the United States—in addition to Chicago. Truly local historical societies began to appear in metropolitan Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century, and at least 18 formed between 1898 and 1941. Most opened in towns and cities located along a north-south axis situated directly next to Lake Michigan, though there were also a handful sprinkled across Chicago's far west-central suburbs.³³

The Lawndale-Crawford Historical Association, established in 1934 on Chicago's near southwest side, exemplifies how residents used historical societies to take ownership over local history. Efforts undertaken by its members reveal a commitment to and nostalgia for an older way of living—a response, perhaps, to concerns about the modern world. Members connected with and venerated early settlers and established a “permanent historical file...with information about early settlers which may be consulted at any time by members of the organization.” They also discussed the development of Lawndale-Crawford from when it “was uninhabited except by an occasional farmer” to the 1930s, by which time it had long since been built up by people “mov[ing] westward...following the Great [Chicago] Fire” of 1871. Association President Larned Meacham wrote in 1938 that it had been a “happy surprise” for him to see an article called “When Chicago was Young”, in which the author helped the “old town of Crawford...to live again,” in the *Chicago Tribune*. Meacham noted the difference between the past and present when he commented, “...the speed and excitement of 1938 is not, to many of us, as wholesome as our cherished recollections of the ‘horse and buggy days.’” To Meacham and other members,

³³ See appendix A for a comprehensive list of historical societies formed in metropolitan Chicago over the past two centuries. Paul Angle, *The Chicago Historical Society, 1856-1956, an unconventional chronicle* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1956), 16, 21.

their historical association provided them with a way to research information about the local past and share it with others living in their community.³⁴

Historical societies operated very differently at the opening of the twentieth century than they had in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By this time, popular interest in history was at an all-time high and historical societies began to engage more intentionally with Americans interested in stories and myths about local and national history. In addition, the amateurization of historical societies provided people with a new way to manage their own engagement with the past. Americans living across the country seized this opportunity, founding a record number of new local historical societies during the first half of the twentieth century. They helped establish an important local history tradition—one in which average, non-professional Americans could explore the past on their own and claim authority over local history in their towns and neighborhoods. The local historical society tradition endured through and after World War II, at which point postwar Americans adapted it to meet the needs of a new generation of local historians. The number of local historical societies they founded greatly outnumbered those founded before the war and together their founders and members exerted considerable influence in their homeplaces. In the Chicago area in particular, residents founded local historical societies in response to demographic change and metropolitan migrations and used local history to shape how change unfolded in their communities. How they responded tells an important story about history's utility as a political tool and illuminates some of the ways heritage intersected with memory, power, and race in postwar Chicagoland.

³⁴ "Lawndale Area History Group Gathers Relics," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1935; and "Voice of the People: Postoffice Wages and Hours," *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1938, both accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, March 2018.

CHAPTER TWO

“IT IS NOW A MATTER OF URGENCY...”: PRESERVATION CONCERNS AND LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES IN ROGERS PARK, GLEN ELLYN, AND CICERO, 1968-1998

Robert Fields moved to Chicago’s Rogers Park neighborhood in 1965, a few years after graduating from college. In early 1968, he spotted a note in the local newspaper inviting anyone interested in saving a threatened historic building—the Sampson House—to a public meeting to discuss the issue. Fields attended the meeting, which local journalist Lily Venson later described as “dramatic,” and listened as fifty or so Rogers Park residents discussed how to prevent developer Lee Snitoff from tearing down the historic home so they could instead turn it into a local history museum. The group advocating for saving the Sampson House met a few more times that spring and began discussing founding a local historical society through which to manage their campaign. They established a steering committee to investigate the necessary steps and a year later, on March 25, 1969, elected the new society’s first officers at a committee meeting at the home of Lily and George Venson. Fields, who served as steering committee chair, left the Venson home that evening having been elected to the post of historical society president.¹

Fields went to the early 1968 gathering hoping to meet some of his neighbors and learn more about Chicago’s far north side. He certainly achieved that, but he also unwittingly walked into a fraught conversation about the future of his new home. Reflecting on his experience at a

¹ Lily Venson, “Move begins to save house,” *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, March 13, 1968, Lily Pagratis Venson Papers, The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL; and Robert Fields, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, May 21, 2018; The quote in the chapter title was taken from Lily Venson, “Momentum Grows to Save House,” *Lerner Newspapers*, April 1968, Lily Pagratis Venson Papers.

Rogers Park café just over fifty years later, Fields explained why he thought Rogers Park residents cared so much about the Sampson House that they founded an entirely new neighborhood organization to manage their attempts to save it from destruction. He said, “Some areas have historical societies because they don't want their history forgotten...and they see their ways of living and life changing, and so it's a way of holding on to a life preserver that they create for themselves...and those people who are like them to say ‘oh we were here first and this is what we did and why we did it...for good reason, and that's why...it was so good. But I look around at the world and it's changing, and the water is getting rough and rocky and dirty.’” He continued, “I think that's what it is. They're afraid. So they have to capture that to say it used to be great...” Fields, still a relative newcomer to Rogers Park in 1968, understood that the effort by other historical society founders to save the Sampson House was about much more than concern for a single historic building.²

Attempts by Rogers Park residents to build a local historical society in response to “their ways of living and life changing” are not unique in metropolitan Chicago or the rest of the United States at this time. Record numbers of history organizations formed across the country after World War II, and “the common denominators in postwar statements of mission stressed their educational objectives and...desire to preserve oases of the pastoral, pre-industrial past at a time of startling technological and urban change.” Numerous urban and suburban residents watched their homeplaces change as populations migrated across metropolises, eroding long-standing barriers between ethnic and racial communities, provoking concerns about economic instability, blight, and urban renewal in aging neighborhoods, and forcing municipal leaders in

² Fields interview.

suburban towns and villages to act in response to residential growth and development. In turn, changes to the built environment contributed to a rise in efforts by preservation-minded citizens to save historic buildings threatened by planners and developers who wanted to replace them with new housing and commercial construction. These trends moved through the Chicago metropolitan area, where residents concerned about historic buildings and streetscapes decided to band together and form local historical societies through which to funnel their preservation efforts.³

This chapter focuses on three local historical societies formed in postwar Chicago—the Rogers Park Historical Society in Chicago’s Rogers Park neighborhood in 1968, the Glen Ellyn Historical Society in Glen Ellyn, IL in 1968, and the Historical Society of Cicero in Cicero, IL in 1983—in response to concerns about historical resources in their communities. Residents forming historical societies felt working through these groups offered the most promising way to achieve their historic preservation goals, which suggests they believed they needed something beyond what was offered by the numerous neighborhood associations, community organizations, and local heritage groups already in existence. Part of their interest in the local historical society

³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 538; Many historians have studied the ways urban and suburban residents used historic preservation to shape the built environment, as well as, to varying extents, the political consequences of their actions. See, for example, Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr. and Walter Kidney, *Historic Preservation in Small Towns: A Manual of Practice* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1980), David Hamer, *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 1998), Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), Aaron Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit: Tourism and Urban Revitalization in the Postwar Rustbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), Ocean Howell, *Making the Mission: Planning and Ethnicity in San Francisco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), and Benjamin Looker, *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Dolores Hayden explores the relationship between the built environment and public memory in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997). She argues that built environments often convey and reinforce racist, sexist, and classist ideologies and that their significant influence on public memory perpetuates structural oppression. This project seeks to reveal how people used local historical societies to shape public memory and historical meanings conveyed by the built environment and other historical landscapes.; See Chapter one for more on rising interest in heritage and heritage organizations in postwar America.

model likely stemmed from broader national interest in and support for heritage work at this time. In addition, though, and perhaps more significantly, forming local historical societies in response to calls to preserve historical resources provided residents with a novel way to respond to local change. Historical society founders and members in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero claimed authority over the local past and used their authority to generate support for their advocacy efforts. Ultimately, each group created histories meant to make people “feel good about place,” which they used to create barriers around their communities and exert a measure of control over the demographic status quo. Not all succeeded in meeting their initial preservation goals, but their stories reveal the varied ways residents used history to advance their interests, how they navigated and utilized municipal resources, how they used heritage to build barriers, and the impact their advocacy efforts had on their communities.

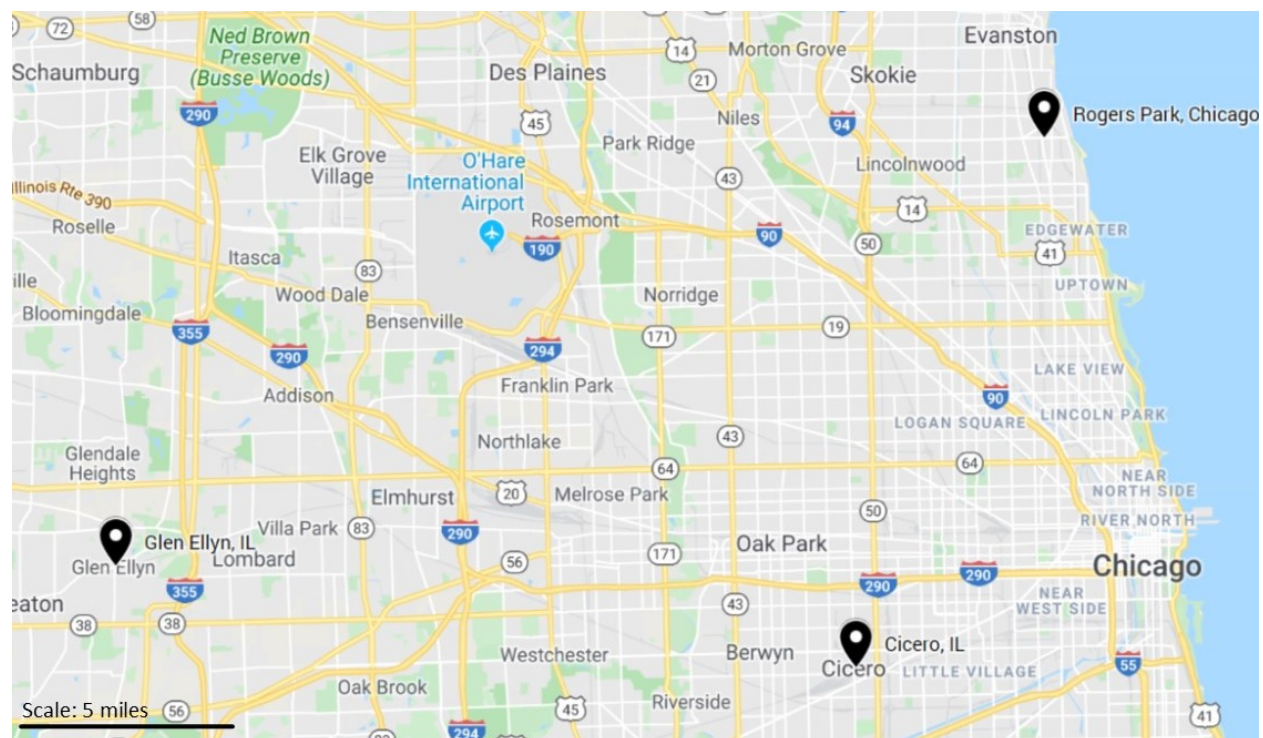


Figure 2. Map of Glen Ellyn, IL; Rogers Park, Chicago, IL; and Cicero, IL.

Source: Base map by Google Maps.

Founding Moments

On a Sunday in late summer 1967, Dorothy Vandercook and other members of the local DuPage chapter of the Daughters of the American Colonists (DAC) arrived at the historic Stacy's Tavern building in Glen Ellyn, Illinois to celebrate the placement of a historical marker (see figure 3). Vandercook served the DAC as "Patriotic Education Chairman" for the local chapter, as well as "National Midwest Chairman" for the larger organization, and she had written a history of Stacy's Tavern for the *DuPage Historical Review* fifteen years before. She likely knew more about the structure than most, if not all, people in Glen Ellyn, and believed the building played an important role in the area's past and future. She told the assembled crowd, "it is vitally important that we study, mark and remember the past, as a solid base from which to plan the future." Though "none of the [Stacy] family [are] left" and the "stage coaches that passed this way...are only memories," she said, "...this building, strong and sturdy like the pioneers who built it and lived there is standing before us today." She continued, "I hope it will be preserved by the village and interested friends as a colorful piece of our past." The DAC group unveiled the marker, which they sponsored in partnership with the Illinois State Historical Society, to much fanfare.⁴

Vandercook likely did not know it then, but local concern about Stacy's Tavern's future would catalyze historic preservation efforts in Glen Ellyn. A few months after the DAC dedicated the marker, the Glen Ellyn village board began to discuss the possibility of purchasing Stacy's Tavern, then in use as a multi-unit apartment building under private ownership and open it for some kind of public use. Keith Nicolls, Glen Ellyn village president, reported in a village

⁴ "Du Page Chapter D.A.C. Places Marker At Stacy's Tavern Site in Glen Ellyn," *Publisher Daily Journal*, August 22, 1967, and Dorothy Vandercook, "Stacy's Tavern," *DuPage Historical Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (1952), both from Glen Ellyn Historical Society (GEHS) collections, Glen Ellyn, IL.

newsletter that he believed "...the purchase of the property could...be considered...a necessary luxury if we are going to preserve any of our colorful past." He expressed uncertainty over the long-term viability of these plans though, writing "I am concerned about who would be willing to devote the time and effort necessary to operate the building as an historical museum..." The village board discussed the issue over the next several months, during which time the Glen Ellyn Rotary Club and Glen Ellyn Women's Club declared their support for the idea. By spring 1968, citing supportive "local residents who want to preserve the old building because it is one of the village's last remaining links with the past," the village board decided to purchase the property.⁵



Figure 3. Stacy's Tavern, October 2019. The blue historic marker dedicated by the DAC in 1967 can be seen at the bottom right of the image. Source: Author's collection

Property in hand, the Glen Ellyn village board decided to form a historical commission to determine how to manage the site and oversee the building's deconversion from apartments to its

⁵ "Stacy's Tavern A Museum?": Welcome to Village of Glen Ellyn newsletter, late 1967, GEHS collections; "Glen Ellyn Decides to Buy Old Landmark," *Chicago Tribune*, March 7, 1968, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers November 2014.

original mid-nineteenth century configuration as a tavern. Village trustee Ruth Norby chaired the commission and suggested they establish a historical society “to help with the tavern and other projects of this nature [in the area].” Having a historical society also provided a way for the village to accept tax-deductible donations for Stacy’s Tavern. The village could not accept such gifts, but a non-profit historical society could, and so the village advised interested donors to send any “funds and historical pieces for display in the museum” to the historical society in return for a tax-deduction. The village historical commission retained responsibility for the “restoration and refurnishing of the...site,” with “assist[ance] by the village beautification commission and new area historical society.” These organizations worked together to restore Stacy’s Tavern for Glen Ellyn residents.⁶

The public directive establishing the Glen Ellyn Historical Society (GEHS) and the society’s relationship to the Village of Glen Ellyn and its historical commission distinguish the GEHS from its preservation-minded counterparts in Rogers Park and Cicero. Neither the Rogers Park Historical Society nor the Historical Society of Cicero operated as official arms of their local governments but were instead founded by private citizens acting without any kind of official municipal authority. While Glen Ellyn’s village board debated whether to purchase Stacy’s Tavern, a group of Rogers Park residents, including Howard Ure, a local leader with deep family roots in the area, Rene Sutor, a local history author, Lily Venson, a journalist for the local Lerner Newspaper group, and Robert Fields grappled with what to do with the Sampson House, a century-old home recently sold by the long-time owner to a developer on Chicago’s

⁶ Untitled article, *DuPage Press*, September 26, 1968; “Glen Ellyn Historical Society,” minutes from the first meeting of “people interested in the restoration of Stacy’s Tavern and in forming a Glen Ellyn Historical Society,” September 14, 1968; and “Glen Ellyn Board Okays Historical Group Slate,” *DuPage Press*, October 17, 1968, all from GEHS collections.

north side. They feared the developer would tear down the vacant historic structure and replace it with new construction. In early January 1968, Ure corresponded with Paul Wigoda, 49th ward alderman (overseeing Rogers Park) about a potential solution to their dilemma. Ure asked Wigoda about the possibility of city support for the formation of a Rogers Park Historical Society that could take over and manage the Sampson House as a local history museum. Wigoda replied to Ure, "...It is a wonderful idea to have a Rogers Park Historical Society, however, this is beyond the corporate authority of the City of Chicago. I feel that this could become a project for a private citizen to purchase this piece of property and maintain it as an historical society for all of the people in the area." Wigoda supported Ure's idea to form a local historical society in Rogers Park but believed the effort would need to be led by private citizens.⁷

Wigoda and Ure's exchange reflects the city of Chicago's broader public-private approach to historic preservation, which Wigoda explained further in a letter he wrote to local journalist and Rogers Park resident Lily Venson the next day. He wrote to Venson about the city's new ordinance to protect historic and architectural landmarks, which he helped pass, but added that he hoped "enlightened, interested citizens [would] start a movement in the City to *privately* preserve landmarks" as well. "The problem" with the new ordinance, Wigoda explained, "will be [deciding] which landmarks are of the greatest significance that we will

⁷ Letter from Paul T. Wigoda to Howard Ure, January 18, 1968, Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS) collections, Chicago, IL; The current RP/WRHS is in the same part of Chicago but is legally a different organization from the Rogers Park Historical Society (RPHS). The RP/WRHS retains some materials related to the original RPHS in its collections. The RP/WRHS is currently in the process of transferring its collections to the Northside Neighborhood History Collection at the Sulzer branch of the Chicago Public Library.; Paul T. Wigoda had been alderman of the 49th ward—the area encompassing Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood—since 1959. See Edward Schreiber, "49th Ward Council Race Won By Wigoda," *Chicago Tribune*, November 4, 1959, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, July 2018; The Chicago City Council established the Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks in 1968, replacing the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks, established in 1957. The 1968 ordinance expanded the commission's scope to include historical, in addition to architectural, landmarks. See Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks booklet, Leon M. Despres papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

spend the tax payers money to preserve.” He did not want Chicago residents to expect city assistance saving and landmarking historic properties and opposed calls—like those made by Rogers Parkers trying to save the Sampson House—for city leaders to use the new ordinance to purchase and maintain historic structures. Wigoda’s interpretation conflicted with Ure and Sutor’s hope that the city would acquire the Sampson House permanently and lease it to the historical society they intended to establish. As weeks passed and Rogers Park residents continued to talk about what to do with the Sampson House, Wigoda maintained a hard line against Rogers Park resident calls for “the city [to] purchase the house under the new landmark ordinance.” Instead of the city taking ownership over the Sampson House, Wigoda suggested that “the 70,000 Rogers Park residents should all chip in and buy the house. It would make an excellent community project to buy the house and use it as an [sic] historical museum.” Wigoda did agree, though, to try and “designate the old home a landmark” under the new city ordinance.⁸

Lacking any kind of official partnership with or support from the city of Chicago, residents interested in saving the Sampson House and using it as their new historical society headquarters struck a deal with Lee Snitoff, the developer who had purchased the property. Snitoff agreed to give the building to Ure, Venson, Fields, and Sutor’s “newly formed Community Historical committee” along with \$500 to help them “move the house” so he could “build an apartment building on the site.” The committee then asked Erwin Weiner, the superintendent of adjacent Pottawattomie Park, if they could move the house onto park land. Weiner entertained the idea and said that while “such a request was unprecedented...if the

⁸ Letter from Paul T. Wigoda to Lily Venson, January 19, 1968, RP/WRHS collections (italics at “privately” added for emphasis by author); Pam McAllister, “Will and Old House Be Happy as a Museum?” *Chicago Tribune*, March 7, 1968, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, June 2018; and Lily Venson, “Historian offers aid: Landmark gains support,” *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, January 24, 1968 and Lily Venson, “Move begins to save house,” both from Lily Pagratis Venson Papers.

residents formed an official organization...and presented a written request, it would receive the commission's attention." Wigoda opposed this plan, saying, "I think the house would fall apart, if it were moved...I think the community should try to get the park board to give them a room for the historical society in one of the park fieldhouses." But, he added, he "would not hinder community attempts" to move the house to the park and would respect the decision made by the park superintendent. None of it mattered, in the end. "Vandals...set fire to the building" on April 8, 1968, damaging it beyond repair and ending "hopes for converting [the]...100-year-old house...into an historical museum," forcing historical society founders to consider other possible homes for their organization.⁹

Despite this setback, Rogers Park residents moved forward with their idea to start a historical society, citing a need for an organization that could house "all sorts of yellowed papers, rusty tools, and tattered dresses" brought together by Rogers Parkers for the "community's diamond jubilee" in 1968. Fields, like Wigoda, supported housing the historical society in a room in the Pottawattomie Park fieldhouse, saying it would make the society more inviting to "our younger and future generations" because it would be situated "within their active environment." He described his vision: "A room would...be established as the Rogers Park Historical Society library/museum...the historical society would not only serve as the community archives but would present to the residents of Rogers Park the new ideas and plans for our area and city through changing exhibits." During the course of the following year,

⁹ "Residents Seek Home for 100-year-old House," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1968 and "Will an Old House Be Happy as a Museum?" *Chicago Tribune*, March 7, 1968, both accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, May 2018; and Lily Venson, "RP Historical Society: Question still remains: where to put collection," *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, April 17, 1968, Northside Neighborhood History Collection (NNHC), Sulzer branch, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL.

Alderman Wigoda helped the steering committee acquire a charter, at which point they elected officers and began to drum up wider support for the historical society.¹⁰

Like the Rogers Park Historical Society, the Historical Society of Cicero (HSC) was formed by a group of private citizens concerned about the immediate future of a significant historical resource. But unlike the Rogers Park residents, HSC founders did not seek sustained municipal support and so did not focus as intently on building relationships with elected municipal officials. The earliest interest in forming a local historical society in Cicero manifested when Jack Leckel, “head of the language arts department” at Cicero’s Morton East High School, began to build “his own [local history] archives” there in 1976. A couple of years later, in 1978, employees at Cicero’s Hawthorne Works, a major Western Electric manufacturing site for AT&T, established their own on-site museum to celebrate “Hawthorne Works’ 75th anniversary” and preserve “items and apparatus manufactured at Hawthorne during its history.” When Western Electric announced in 1983 that it intended to close Hawthorne Works, Leckel worked with Cicero resident Norma Zbasnik to establish a local historical society that could take ownership over the Hawthorne Works museum and collection.¹¹

Leckel and Zbasnik felt that the items and memorabilia in the collection reflected the labor of generations of Ciceronian families and should not, as was considered by Western Electric, leave Cicero to “be distributed to outlying AT&T plants.” Hawthorne Works was by far the area’s largest employer and Zbasnik and Leckel believed its legacy was tied inextricably to

¹⁰ Lily Venson, “RP Historical Society: Question still remains: where to put collection”; and “Meeting Thursday: RP Historical Society makes plans for home,” *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, June 4, 1969, NNHC.

¹¹ Jeffrey Steele, “Historical Society volunteers keep museum connected to times,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 30, 1994, and letter from Hawthorne Works Museum Committee to Illinois Bell Telephone Company,” June 7, 1978, both from the Historical Society of Cicero (HSC) collections, Cicero Public Library, Cicero, IL.

the history of many of Cicero's families. Susan Saccaro, a local journalist who spoke with Zbasnik about the closure, explained the close ties between Cicero's history and Western Electric: "The Western Electric Hawthorne museums holds the treasures from the early 1900s to the present which depict not only the town's growth, but the growth of American technology as well...Displays in the museum reflect the life of employees, most of whom were Cicero residents, and the company and town's development since the plant opened in 1903." Western Electric "invest[ed] company money to make [Hawthorne Works] a social and recreational center" for its employees and their families—"the plant had its own park, gymnasium, tennis courts and running track [and]...offered dances, band concerts, variety shows and picnics." To Saccaro, Zbasnik, and Leckel, Western Electric played an important role cultivating community and social cohesion among Cicero residents throughout the twentieth century, earning it a starring role in Cicero's local history.¹²

Zbasnik, Leckel, and other interested residents formed the Historical Society of Cicero in 1983 to amass the resources necessary to secure Western Electric's agreement to give the museum collection to the HSC. Western Electric representative Robert Jarich agreed that such a gift "would be Western Electric's legacy to Cicero...but before the great giveaway can take place, the society must prove it can provide funds to maintain, relocate and take care of the museum permanently." The new historical society board met for the first time in January 1984, electing Zbasnik to the post of president, and Zbasnik wrote soon after to Morton High School asking if the society could move into one of its vacant rooms. The high school administration

¹² Susan Saccaro, "Future of Museum Key to Town's Past," *The Life*, December 11, 1983; Norma Zbasnik statement in P.T.O Newsletter, March 14, 1985; *Backtracks* newsletter, 1 (1) summer 1985; all from HSC collections; and Tom Pelton, "Hawthorne Works' glory now just now much rubble," *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1994, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, April 2019.

agreed, and the Hawthorne Works museum re-opened there under historical society ownership on October 20, 1985. Hawthorne Works and AT&T worked closely with the historical society to ensure the museum's successful transition. Zbasnik reported that "AT&T spent more than \$250,000 to renovate and equip Room 200 of the school" before the society officially moved in and opened the museum.¹³

Responding to Local Change: Making "the past...a living part of our community..."¹⁴

To historical society founders in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero, their efforts to preserve historical resources belonged to broader, ongoing conversations about how to manage changes to the built environment provoked by population migrations across and within the metropolis. In Glen Ellyn, concerns included how to maintain a small-town aesthetic amid changes to the built environment resulting from a significant rise in local population. Reflecting on the 1960s in their 1976 book about Glen Ellyn's history, Blythe Kaiser and Dorothy Vandercook wrote that the village population had grown significantly in recent decades, from 15,914 in 1960 and 18,200 in 1964 to 21,909 in 1970 (see table 2), and in DuPage County the population "had tripled in twenty years" to 505,000 (see table 3). As a result, they explained, "In Du Page county many cornfields became villages and towns... Many factories and businesses came...[and] the number of farms decreased as the homes and apartments and condominiums increased." The Glen Ellyn village board passed several laws to manage the need for new housing, including a 1960 "ordinance prohibiting any two houses of identical exterior to be located on the same block or around the corner from one another" that was "meant to discourage

¹³ Saccaro; Letter from Norma Zbasnik to Kenneth Keeling, May 4, 1984; and Anna Flasz, "Western Museum opens today," *The Life*, October 20, 1985, all from HSC collections.

¹⁴ Quote from Lily Venson article, "RP Historical Society: Question still remains: where to put collection."

prefabricated housing in the village” and “prevent Glen Ellyn from being overrun by tract housing.” Eight years later, the village board established the “Historic Sites Commission, an advisory board for preservation issues” and purchased Stacy’s Tavern to, in the words of Glen Ellyn Village Manager William Galligan, preserve “the last tie with our past.” The commission created the Glen Ellyn Historical Society to protect local heritage and manage the Stacy’s “restoration and future area projects” as part of the village’s ongoing efforts to control changes to the built environment.¹⁵

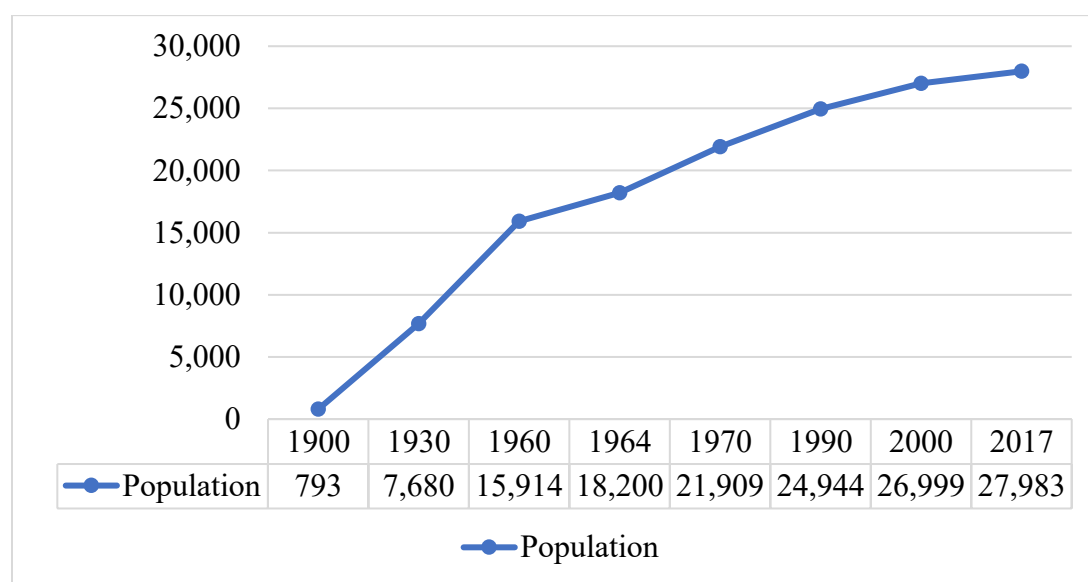


Table 2. Population of Glen Ellyn, IL, 1900-2017.

¹⁵ Blythe P. Kaiser and Dorothy I. Vandercook, *Glen Ellyn's Story and her neighbors in Du Page* (Glen Ellyn, IL: Dorothy Vandercook, 1976), 272, 300; Historic Preservation Graduate Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, “Before It’s Too Late: Protecting the Character of Glen Ellyn,” December 2002, <http://glenellynpreservation.org/site/surveys.html>, accessed June 2018, 10; Greg Mahoney, “Out of Small Taverns Big Towns Grew,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 3-4, 1968, GEHS collections; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), “Community Data Snapshot” for Glen Ellyn, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/102881/Glen+Ellyn.pdf>, accessed April 2019; and Jane Teague, “Glen Ellyn, IL,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/517.html>, accessed April 2019.

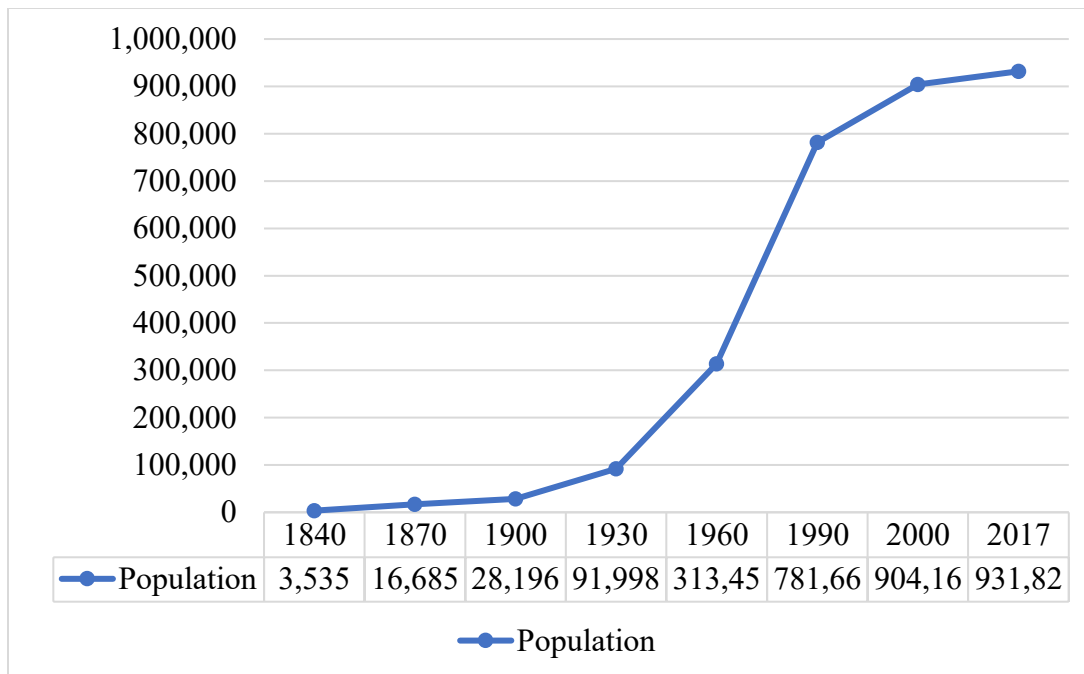


Table 3. Population of DuPage County, IL, 1840-2017.

Rogers Park residents faced a similar situation. The fight to preserve the Sampson House belonged to a broader local conversation about how to best manage urban decay and new development across the neighborhood. The Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC) identified issues with urban decay in the 1950s and early 1960s, when RPCC leaders began responding to “a frightening situation” in Rogers Park’s northeast corner. They explained, “In this, one of the most densely populated areas in Chicago due to overbuilding in the 1920s, we find alarming signs of urban decay...” In addition to issues with residential density, according to the RPCC, many of the area’s older buildings needed significant repairs and “must be condemned and torn down to create open space” to improve life for area residents. Alderman Wigoda voiced concerns about the growing number of “blighted, abandoned neighborhood stores” as well, and worried about the erosion of Rogers Park’s commercial areas as more consumers chose to shop at new suburban shopping malls. Wigoda and RPCC leaders believed they needed to respond before the decay worsened to a point where they needed to seek outside help in the form of “public funds”

or urban renewal.¹⁶

Wigoda and the RPCC also responded to concerns about growth and new development, with the RPCC calling “the force of growth and the force of decay” the “two great forces...converging on [Rogers Park].” The RPCC issued a policy statement in early 1966 explaining the ties between decay and growth, saying they needed “community planning” in Rogers Park “to avoid the experience of other communities [where] decay was permitted to deteriorate into blight, and growth was achieved literally on the rubble of neglected buildings.” Wigoda shared concerns about the long-term effects of uncontrolled growth, believing it posed a threat to Rogers Park’s urban character and undermined local efforts to make sure Rogers Park remained a “good place to live and work.” For example, zoning laws allowed developers to convert vacant commercial properties into residences, reducing the number of deteriorating commercial buildings but also producing residential areas that did not “conform to all of the residential requirements for setbacks and lot lines.” Wigoda worried that this trend would produce “suburban type communities in the city”—residential areas “completed with a [single] shopping center”—and erode the neighborly ties that made Rogers Park attractive to residents. Wigoda explained, “It is not bad zoning to have a mixture of residential areas and service type businesses—such as barbers, drug stores, grocers, etc. These convenient stores often keep a

¹⁶ The literature on urban blight, decay, and urban renewal is vast. For a cursory introduction to both in Chicago, see Arnold Hirsch, “Urban Renewal,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online* <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1295.html>, accessed April 2019. Residents formed the Rogers Park Community Council in 1952 to preserve public access to Rogers Park’s street-end beaches. See “Our History,” Northside Community Resources, <https://www.northsidecommunityresources.org/about/history/>, accessed November 2019.; Gail Danks Welter, “The Effects of Demographic and Institutional change on the Image and Reputation of an Urban Community,” (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago), 1982, 90; Welter noted Rogers Park residents in the 1950s and 1960s were “determined to save their area from deterioration, before it became a fact. See Welter, 136.; Lily Venson, “‘Signs of urban decay’ trigger response,” *Rogers Park News*, January 12, 1966, and “Wigoda seeks study to combat blight,” *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, November 8, 1967, both from Lily Pagratis Venson Papers; and Lily Venson, “RPCC needs \$\$ aid,” *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, undated, but context strongly suggests April, May, or June 1969, NNHC.

community alive and safe” and “have in many instances been the first to come to the aid of the community. In this era of impersonal big business...It is these store operators who know our children and families.” The RPCC and Wigoda believed they needed to better manage new development to ensure changes to the built environment met resident needs and kept them happily settled in Rogers Park.¹⁷

Local leaders worked to better respond to and manage neglect, decay, and new development because they worried about the effects of these phenomena on the residential population in Rogers Park. At that time, Rogers Park’s predominantly white ethnic population had not yet begun its eventual exodus to suburban Chicago, and though the number of “Spanish-speaking people,” black Chicagoans, and people who claimed South Asian descent moving to Rogers Park had begun to slowly increase, Rogers Park was still “predominantly white” in the late 1960s (see tables 4 and 5). Nonetheless, Rogers Park residents were well aware that white residents might choose to leave Rogers Park for suburban communities with newer housing, modern shopping centers, ample parks and open space, and better-resourced cultural, religious, and educational institutions. They also knew what happened to urban neighborhoods that ignored decay and blight and wanted to avoid having to seek “public funds” to rehabilitate Rogers Park. In response, in 1957, the “Rogers Park Chamber of Commerce and the ad hoc Rogers Park Rejuvenation Committee” released a “renovation plan for the area’s businesses,” and in 1963, the RPCC resolved to “create a dynamic and vital community, and to develop its physical, cultural, educational, economic, and religious resources in order to make this a more desirable plan [sic] in which to live.” Two years later, in 1965, the RPCC followed its resolution with the

¹⁷ Lily Venson, “RP Council to hold public hearings,” *Rogers Park News*, March 6, 1966, Lily Pagratis Venson Papers; Lily Venson, “Wigoda seeks study to combat blight,” and Lily Venson, “RPCC needs \$\$ aid.”

beginnings of a plan “for preserving and improving Rogers Park” in order to “retain the present population” and prevent “human dislocation.” Wigoda also took action, proposing to Harry Chaddick, then head of Chicago’s Zoning Board of Appeals, in 1967 that Chaddick “undertake a study” to better understand mixed residential and commercial zoning’s effects on surrounding neighborhoods. Paul Wigoda and the Roger Park Chamber of Commerce, Rejuvenation Committee, and Community Council, among others, took proactive steps to maintain a stable residential population in Rogers Park.¹⁸

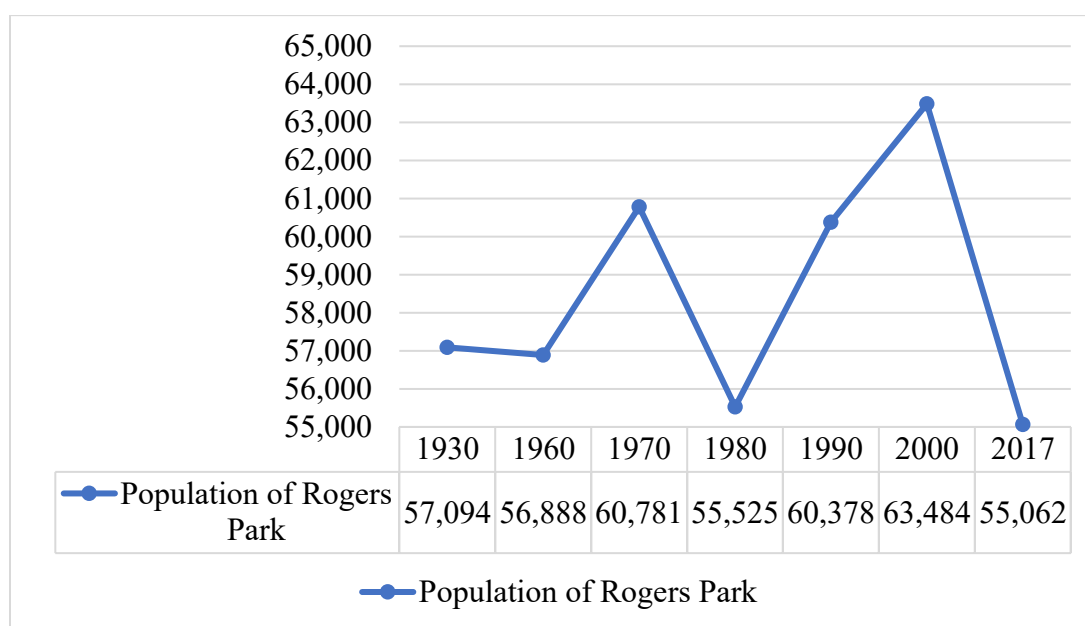


Table 4. Population of Rogers Park, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

¹⁸ Patricia Mooney-Melvin, “Rogers Park,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1086.html>, accessed May 2019; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, “Community Data Snapshot” for Rogers Park, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/Rogers+Park.pdf>, accessed July 2019, and census data drawn from John McCarron and Stanley Ziemba, “City black areas growing: census,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1981, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, November 2019; Welter, 49, 63-64, 71-72, 92, 94; Venson, “Wigoda seeks study to combat blight,” and “RP Council to hold public hearings”; At that time, “the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Chicago listed Rogers Park as a critical area for open spaces.” See Lily Venson, “Park District asked to buy land near Pottawattomie,” *The Sunday Star*, August 10, 1969, Lily Pagratis Venson Papers; Rogers Park’s postwar white ethnic population consisted primarily of Russian Jews, Germans, and Polish immigrants and their descendants. Much more significant demographic change came to Rogers Park in the 1970s and 1980s and is considered in more depth in chapter 3.

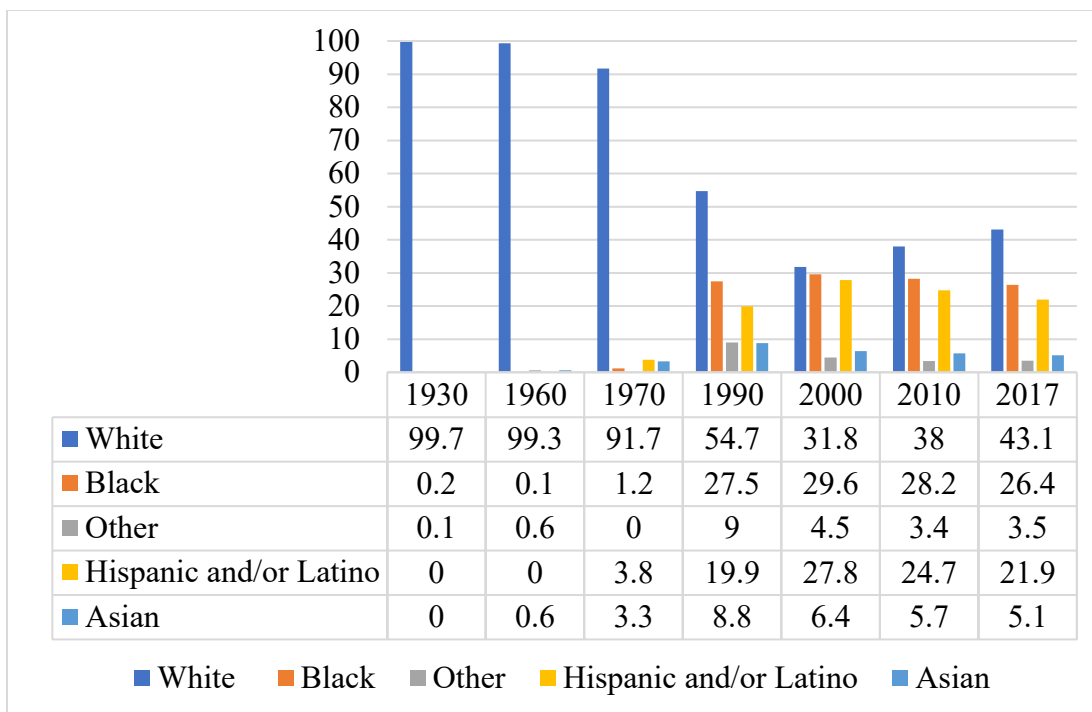


Table 5. Demographic Change in Rogers Park, Chicago, 1930-2017.¹⁹

The debate about tearing down the Sampson House exemplified local anxiety about neglect and growth. Alderman Wigoda, for example, argued that allowing the developer to raze the Sampson House and others nearby to make way for a new apartment complex would add “further congestion” to neighboring Pottawattomie Park and the “surrounding neighborhood,” making the entire area less attractive to current and prospective residents. Local property-owner Gilbert Lawson, responding to Snitoff’s proposal to replace the single-family Sampson House with an apartment complex, said “The desirability of city living is constantly threatened by the increased density and congestion of the single-minded profit motive of builders and developers, without regard to...the best interests of the people who live there. This uncontrolled condition over the last few decades has resulted in the creation of slums of the future.” Lawson and

¹⁹ The values for 1970 were drawn from Welter, who did not include a value for “other.”

Wigoda, like members of the Rogers Park Community Council and Chamber of Commerce, wanted development that boosted Rogers Park's ability to attract and retain residents.²⁰

Forming a local historical society provided Rogers Park residents with a way to influence proposed changes to the built environment and, relatedly, the demographic composition of Rogers Park. Venson and Ure's attempts in early 1968 to convince the city of Chicago, through Wigoda, to purchase the Sampson House property suggest they believed they could use Chicago's newly strengthened landmarks ordinance to save the house and, if successful, rely on the ordinance to support future preservation efforts. A historical society also provided a way for society members to insist local leaders consider the past when making decisions about planning, growth, and residential stability in their neighborhood. Robert Fields explained in April 1968 that the society would benefit Rogers Park residents by "not only serv[ing] as the community archives, but...[also] present[ing] to the residents of Rogers Park the new ideas and plans for our area and city." He continued, "...the past can become a living part of our community...its presence will establish an effective interplay of ideas and promote progressive action in the development of Rogers Park as a vital part of a great city." The following March, at the RPHS steering committee meeting at Lily Venson's home, the assembled members decided to "concentrate their efforts toward making the Rogers Park Historical Society an active, relevant organization rather than merely directing their efforts to preservation of past history and memorabilia." They believed local leaders needed to incorporate lessons from the past into their efforts to make Rogers Park a desirable place to live.²¹

²⁰ Lily Venson, "Park district asked to buy land near Pottawattomie."

²¹ Ocean Howell explores the role played by local neighborhood organizations in municipal decision-making processes in *Making the Mission: Planning and Ethnicity in San Francisco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). As a result, "in the twentieth century, many neighborhood-based groups in American cities would come to exert significant influence and sometimes decisive influence over the physical and social planning of the areas they

In Cicero, the desire to keep Western Electric's Hawthorne Works museum and collection within the town limits also reflected anxieties about local change. Hawthorne Works had employed a majority of Cicero's residents, including many eastern and central European immigrants and their descendants, since its opening in 1903 and 1904 and historical society founders believed Hawthorne Works played a significant role in white ethnic life in Cicero throughout the twentieth century. Lucyna Migala, reporting in November 1985 for WCEV radio ("Chicagoland's Ethnic Voice") about the new historical society, reflected on Hawthorne Works' importance to white ethnic families. "The Hawthorne Works were much more than just a place to work," she explained, and "back in the 1930's and 40's, the Cicero factory complex was the center of life, offering social activities, sports, educational and cultural events for its more than 20 thousand employees." The immigrants who moved to Cicero often did so, Migala said, because "they knew all about life at Hawthorne Works from letters of relatives who had immigrated to the United States earlier" and "were lured to this country by the prospect of a good job at Western Electric." To Migala and founders of the Historical Society of Cicero, Hawthorne Works and Cicero did not exist without each other.²²

Zbasnik, Leckel, and other Historical Society of Cicero founders' attempts to save the Hawthorne Works collection stemmed in part from worry about the fate of the collection itself, and in part from concern about fading white ethnic influence in Cicero and growing "ethnic

called home. See Howell, 2, 223. David Hamer discusses the relationship between urban renewal and historic preservation in *History in Urban Places*, explaining how concerns about urban renewal "proved to be a crucial catalyst for the emergence of a constituency for action on historic preservation... Preservationists were frequently able to use the financial resources made available via a host of urban renewal programs to promote preservation." See Hamer, 14. Lily Venson, "RP Historical Society: Question still remains: where to put collection;" and "Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting for Rogers Park Historical Society," March 25, 1969, RP/WRHS collections.

²² Mark R. Wilson, Stephen R. Porter, and Janice L. Reiff, "Western Electric Co," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2900.html>, accessed February 2019; and Migala Communications Corporation and WCEV, "Who We Are" report, aired November 6 and 7, 1985, HSC collections.

tensions...with an emerging Hispanic majority.” The number of white ethnic residents in Cicero declined precipitously in the last decades of the twentieth century. Cicero’s white population, as defined by United States Census Bureau, declined forty percent between 1960 and 2000 from 69,093 to 41,327. At the same time, the number of Hispanic residents in Cicero increased from zero percent of the overall population in 1960 to 77.4% of the population in 2000 and about 88.9% in 2017 (see tables 6 and 7). Opening a historical society provided residents like Zbasnik and Leckel with a platform from which to demonstrate the importance of the white ethnic past to Cicero’s development, as well as establish a new, exclusive space for white ethnics as their physical presence in Cicero eroded.²³

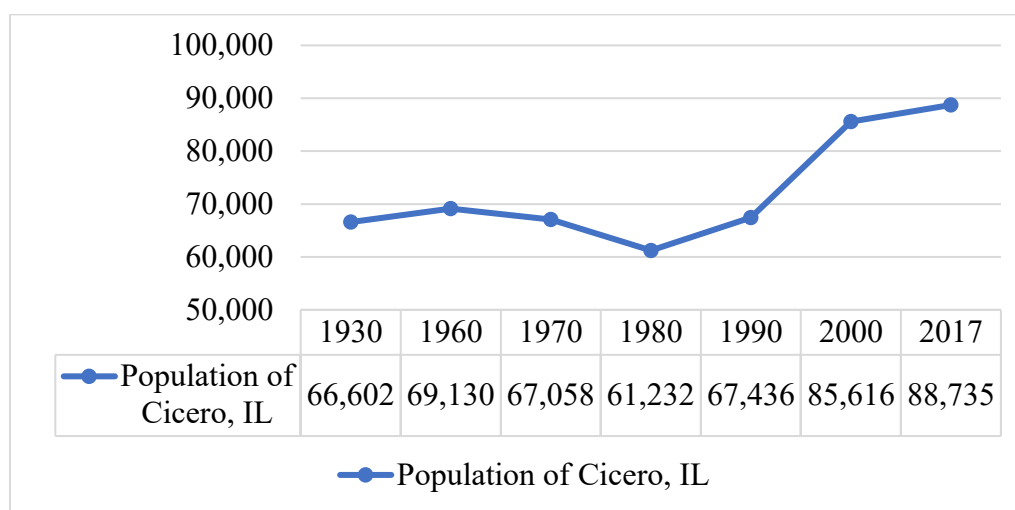


Table 6. Population of Cicero, IL, 1930-2017.

²³ Like Howell, Insa Neumann considers some of the ways white ethnic Americans (Germans, in her case) explored and expressed identity in changing urban spaces. See Insa Neumann, “Negotiating Germanness After World War II: Transformations of German Culture in Postwar New York City,” in Julia Sattler, ed., *Urban Transformations in the U.S.A.: Spaces, Communities, Representations* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2016). Betsy Gurlacz, “Cicero, IL,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/287.html>; United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts, Cicero town, Illinois, Population estimates, July 1, 2018, (V2018),” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cicerotownillinois#>; Andrew Fegelman, “Hispanics Find Home in Cicero,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 1989, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), “Community Data Snapshot” for Cicero, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/102881/Cicero.pdf>, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame, “Bordering the Mainstream: A Needs Assessment of Latinos in Berwyn and Cicero, Illinois,” Institute for Latino Studies, https://latinostudies.nd.edu/assets/95258/original/bordering_mainstream.pdf, all accessed February 2019.

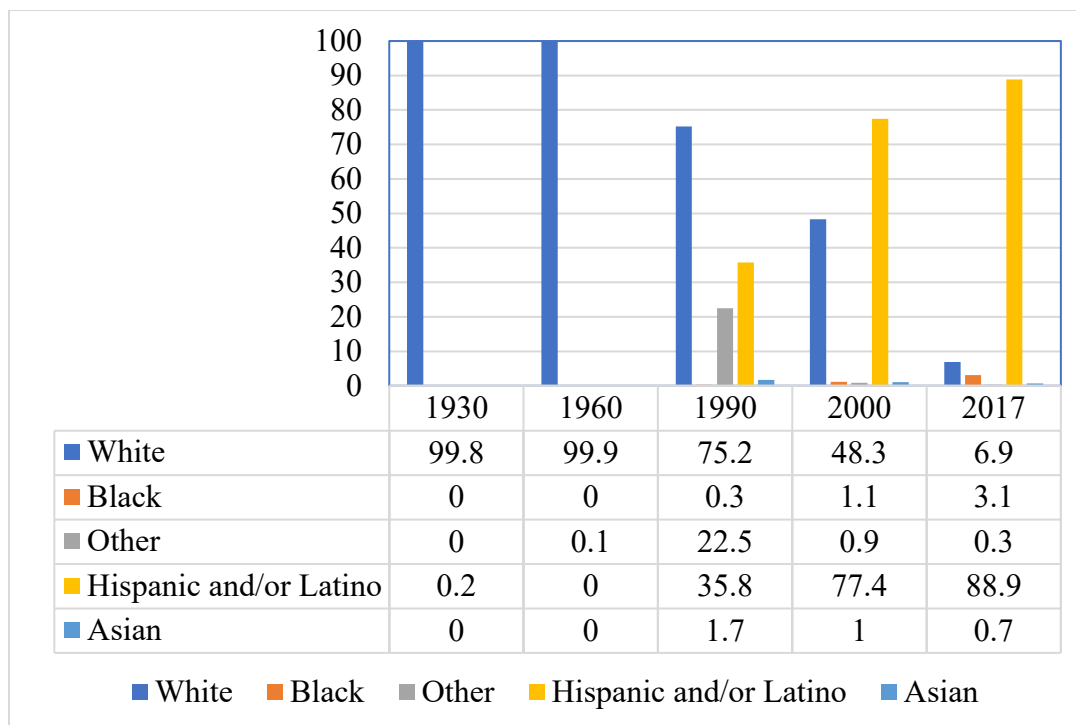


Table 7. Demographic Change by Percentage in Cicero, IL, 1930-2017.²⁴

Historical society founders in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero established their organizations in response to concerns about the fate of historical resources in their communities. Though geographically distant from each other, the perceived threats facing local history in each place resulted from patterns of change sweeping across the Chicago metropolis. Glen Ellyn residents worried about rapid and significant population increases in their village and how to manage changes to the built environment while Rogers Parkers hoped to prevent residential out-migration to suburbs like Glen Ellyn by making their neighborhood a more desirable place to live. And white ethnic residents of Cicero were concerned about the disappearing white ethnic legacy in the wake of Hawthorne Works' closure, white ethnic migration to suburban Chicago, and the in-migration of Hispanic people. People forming historical societies joined local

²⁴ The demographic information for 1990 does not equal 100% because some respondents chose two or more ethnic or racial categories.

conversations about these phenomena and used local history to inform plans for the future of their homeplaces.

Claiming Authority Over the Local Past

Historical society founders established historical societies to draw attention to local history amid discussions about local change. Working through historical societies did not ensure successful outcomes though, and historical society founders worked hard to amass authority over the local past with people who had the power necessary to influence local decision-making. It certainly helped that calls to preserve historic properties and materials in Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero came from people with experience in local history work. The founders of the Rogers Park Historical Society included Howard Ure, a well-known descendent of a long-time Rogers Park family who was so influential that the city of Chicago named a local beach after him and Rene Sutor, who had written a “history of Rogers park” and “presented [it] in a pageant at Loyola Community Theater.” Ure also led efforts by the Howard Area Chamber of Commerce and the local newspaper to commemorate “Rogers Park’s Diamond Jubilee” in 1968. The original Glen Ellyn Historical Society board of directors included Dorothy Vandercook who worked with the local chapters of the Daughters of the American Colonists and Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as the DuPage County Historical Society, and held leadership positions in each organization. Blythe Kaiser also joined the Glen Ellyn Historical Society’s founding cohort when Glen Ellyn Historical Commission chair Ruth Norby appointed Kaiser co-chair (with Leland Marks) of the “group...work[ing] on the formation of a Historical Society.” Kaiser was the “Organizing Regent for the DuPage Chapters of the Daughters of the American Colonists” in 1943 and an organizing member of the local Anan Harmon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1924. In Cicero, Jack Leckel led local history efforts at

Morton High School, including publishing local history information in the high school's *Portage* magazine, before working with Norma Zbasnik and Robert Malinski to establish the Historical Society of Cicero.²⁵

Historical society founders also sought influence by seeking connections to and building relationships with local elected officials and civic organizations in their communities. In addition to serving area organizations themselves—Zbasnik, for example, had “volunteered for organizations such as the PTA...Morton Scholarship League, Cicero Woman's Club and Cicero Chamber of Commerce and Industry”—historical society founders invited people from active local civic groups to their early meetings. When Rene Sutor called Rogers Park Historical Society's first official meeting to order on May 23, 1968, she did so in meeting space provided by the Rogers Park Woman's Club. In attendance were local Chicago alderman Paul Wigoda and state representative Paul Elward, as well as representatives from the Rogers Park library, a local community center, and two area religious congregations. Society founder Howard Ure also served as a board member of the Rogers Park Community Council, which sent representatives to the earliest 1968 meetings about saving the Sampson House. The situation was similar in Glen Ellyn. Early Glen Ellyn Historical Society meetings included Keith Nicolls, Glen Ellyn village president, and representatives from the Village Beautification Commission, the local Reliquarians group, the North Glen Ellyn Girl Scouts Troop, the Business and Professional

²⁵ Venson, "Historian offers aid: Landmark gains support"; Meeting minutes, committee exploring the establishment of a local historical society in Glen Ellyn, November 23, 1968, and "Celebrities at Stacy's," *Glen Ellyn News*, November 20, 1974, both from GEHS collections; and Kaiser and Vandercook, 185, 236, 255, 292-293. "Howard Ure Beach Park," Chicago Park District, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/howard-ure-beach-park>, accessed February 2019; The city of Chicago also named Howard Street after Howard Ure. When Howard Ure was a child, his father, John F. Ure, "donated the right-of-way" for [what would become] Howard Avenue to the city and "offered [his]...child's first name for the street." See Hank Morris, "For Whom were our Parks and Public Schools Named?" Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society website, <https://rpwrhs.org/2014/08/04/441-2/>, accessed February 2019, and "Howard Ure, lifelong Howard Street booster," *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 1984, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, February 2019.

Woman's Club, the Glen Ellyn Woman's Club, the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, and the Glen Ellyn Park Board, in addition to the DAC and DAR and the DuPage County and Lombard Historical Societies.²⁶

The relationship between historical society and municipal authority was especially important to the Glen Ellyn and Rogers Park societies because each group needed municipal support to navigate matters related to preserving historic structures. The process was straightforward in Glen Ellyn—the village board created the historical commission, which in turn formed the historical society. These interconnected relationships ensured the historical society occupied an influential position in matters related to local historic preservation. Rogers Park Historical Society founders wanted similar influence over historic preservation in Rogers Park, but the nature of historic preservation in Chicago led them down a different path. Establishing connections to civic groups and local authorities was especially important in Rogers Park because local aldermen had, and still have, significant influence over new development and the built environment in their respective wards. The founders of the Rogers Park Historical Society actively cultivated relationships with Alderman Paul Wigoda because they knew he had the power to make definitive decisions about historic preservation in the 49th ward.²⁷

Leckel, Zbasnik, and others involved in the Historical Society of Cicero's formation managed to achieve their immediate goals without seeking similar working relationships with

²⁶ Jeffrey Steele, "Historical Society volunteers keep museum connected to times"; Venson, "Historian offers aid: Landmark gains support;" List of people "present at the organizing meeting of the Glen Ellyn Historical Society," May 15, 1969, GEHS collections; and meeting minutes, Rogers Park Historical Society, May 15, 1969, RP/WRHS collections.

²⁷ See Yue Zhang, *The Fragmented Politics of Urban Preservation: Beijing, Chicago, and Paris* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) for more on aldermanic privilege in Chicago and how aldermanic privilege impacted development and historic preservation across the city's wards.

town of Cicero civic groups and elected officials. A sense of urgency fueled their efforts, but their preservation goals did not involve an attempt at transference of private property to a public body, as in Rogers Park and Glen Ellyn. Even so, they too sought connections with the town of Cicero despite the fact that sanction from the town was not technically necessary for the successful completion of the society's early projects. One of Zbasnik's first orders of business after the historical society formed was to "look into receiving a Proclamation from Town Hall," Cicero's town clerk "swore in" the historical society's board on June 19, 1984, and the town of Cicero's Board of Trustees passed a resolution sending "best wishes to the Society for the success of its worthy efforts" that same day.²⁸

By claiming the name historical society and building relationships with local history leaders, elected officials, and civic organizations, historical society founders sought to build a unique kind of authority over the local past. Their blend of local history knowledge and civic influence endowed their local historical societies with a kind of civic historical authority not available to the many other existing community groups, neighborhood organizations, and heritage and local history groups already working to improve and enhance various elements of local life. The Glen Ellyn village board appointed a historical commission, which in turn established a new Glen Ellyn Historical Society to make decisions related to the conversion of Stacy's Tavern into a historical museum. Rogers Park residents interested in saving the Sampson House funneled their efforts through the new Rogers Park Historical Society, which they believed offered the strongest and most appropriate avenue through which to argue for the building's preservation. And in Cicero, Leckel and Zbasnik established the Historical Society of

²⁸ Historical Society of Cicero meeting minutes, February 16, 1984; and Dawn Padalino, "Society members trace Cicero's roots," *The Life*, June 24, 1984, both from HSC collections.

Cicero to justify their claims to the Hawthorne Works museum and collection. None of these groups established their local historical societies purely out of love for local history, though an interest in the local past certainly contributed to their efforts. They chose to work through local historical societies because the historical authority embedded in societies and their founders bolstered their arguments and justifications for saving historical materials.

The willingness of influential local leaders to pay attention to and work with local historical societies—especially in Glen Ellyn and Rogers Park—reflects the significant place each group occupied in their respective municipalities. This was not a given or universal experience for the many local-level organizations operating across Chicago’s metropolitan area. In Chicago, for example, according to historian Amanda Seligman, neighborhood “block clubs’ appeals to their aldermen for assistance or meetings often went ignored.” But local officials sustained, and in Glen Ellyn’s case welcomed, connections with their local historical societies, a situation that likely derives in part from the combined influence of the many local leaders involved in these groups. Most, and possibly all, were well-connected, white, and middle- or upper-middle class people who had no need to play the “politics of respectability” game, as groups without these connections were often forced to do to gain the attention of people who could affect local change.²⁹

²⁹ Amanda Seligman, *Chicago’s Block Clubs: How Neighbors Shape the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 9, 16, e-book version; For more on the many kinds of neighborhood, community, and heritage organizations working in the postwar decades, see Harry Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), Patricia Mooney-Melvin, *American Community Organizations: A Historical Dictionary* (Greenwood Press, 1986), and Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*.

“Love of Place,” Future-Planning, and Heritage Barriers in Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero

In the months and years after residents founded historical societies in Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero, each group worked to save historical resources in their respective homeplaces. Rogers Park residents advocated for saving the Sampson House while their counterparts in Glen Ellyn worked to restore and open Stacy’s Tavern to the public. In Cicero, society founders negotiated with Western Electric leadership for the transference of the Hawthorne Works collection to their care before Western Electric shut down the Cicero facility. In each case, society members used their historical authority to create and share histories meant to instill “love of place” among residents and make them “feel good about place.” They used this strategy to build support for local heritage and their respective preservation efforts and demand protection for what came before. In Glen Ellyn and Rogers Park, society members encouraged local leaders to safeguard heritage when considering how to accommodate and manage changes to the built environment, while society members in Cicero tried to build a haven for the area’s remaining white ethnic families. In so doing, society members used history to build barriers—some physical and some imagined—around their homeplaces in an effort to manage outsider access to their communities. Their success varied, but their experiences reveal some of the ways people used history and local historical societies to exert power over place in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero.

During the Glen Ellyn Historical Society’s first decade of life, from when the village board and historical commission decided to establish a historical society in 1968 to the dedication of Stacy’s Tavern in 1976, members spent long hours collecting and sharing historical information about the area’s earliest white settlers, founding institutions, local heroes, and

significant local milestones to instill “love of place” among Glen Ellyn residents and build a network of people who supported their projects. In 1968 and 1969, for example, GEHS members justified preserving Stacy’s Tavern by emphasizing its importance to the formation of the village, claiming it was “the last [extant] vestige of early Glen Ellyn” and “built...by...one of Du Page county’s first settlers.” Restoring the building, they hoped, would “perpetuate the memory and spirit of the men and woman who pioneered this vicinity.” *Chicago Tribune* journalist Greg Mahoney described their restoration efforts as “indicative of the debt the county owes to its early taverns and hostels,” writing “Stacy’s Tavern...played a major role in the settling of what is now Glen Ellyn.” Mahoney quoted William Galligan, Glen Ellyn village manager, saying the tavern was “the last tie with our past.” Indeed, the GEHS board assured supporters that project architect Gerald Perkins, who served on Glen Ellyn’s Historic Sites Commission with Vandercook, Norby, and other GEHS founders, would do everything he could to restore the property to what it looked like in the decade after its construction.³⁰

GEHS founders and members began using the historical society’s authority over local history to intervene in decisions related to Glen Ellyn’s built environment soon after its formation. In 1970, for example, Jane Stoll wrote on the GEHS’ behalf to Frank Crouch, president of Glen Ellyn’s park district, regarding the park district’s plan to install a new memorial. Stoll asked Crouch to involve a “representative from our society” who could “meet with the park District and other groups to express our disapproval of the [memorial’s proposed] location.” Stoll alluded to the GEHS’ authority over local history matters, noting “our society is

³⁰ Glen Ellyn Historical Society Articles of Incorporation, July 1969; Norman Clegg, “Public Says ‘Yes’ to Saving Tavern,” *DuPage County Times*, January 24, 1968; Greg Mahoney, “Out of Small Taverns Big Towns Grew”; “Board Considers Stacy’s Tavern For Museum,” *Glen Ellyn News*, undated 1968; “Stacy’s Tavern,” Glen Ellyn Historical Society, undated but context suggests 1969/70; and Glen Ellyn Historical Society newsletter, May 1970, all from GEHS collections.

interested in the heritage of Glen Ellyn and the preservation of all worthwhile artifacts. We also want to be involved in the present and future memorials for these too will become part of our heritage in the years to come.” GEHS leaders understood that new memorials would likely remain on the local landscape for many decades and influence how Glen Ellyn residents understood the village’s past.³¹

The GEHS also intervened in village decisions affecting Glen Ellyn’s built environment. On April 19, 1972, Jane Stoll, again writing on behalf of the historical society, sent a letter to the Village of Glen Ellyn’s Board of Trustees conveying the society board’s concerns about Glen Ellyn’s new master plan. “Gentleman,” Stoll wrote, “The proposed Master Plan of Glen Ellyn does not follow the ideas of the Glen Ellyn Historical Society which are the preservation of the village atmosphere as opposed to the urbanization recommended by professional planners.” She continued, “We are especially concerned about the proposed demolition of early homes to make way for the highrise apartment buildings and the restructuring of the central business district.” Stoll closed the letter with a “request that” a village representative attend the GEHS’ May meeting to “discuss the proposed Master Plan.” She also suggested that the village board “make [its] members...available to all village organizations...” Stoll’s letter conveyed the GEHS board’s anxiety about the future of Glen Ellyn’s historic structures, including “early homes” and the local Carnegie library, as well as their concerns about threats to the “village atmosphere” and the Village Board’s visions for the future of Glen Ellyn’s built environment.³²

³¹ "The Readers' Forum: Open Letter" in *DuPage County Times*, November 13, 1968, by "Stacy's Tavern Publicity Committee"; and Letter from Jane Stoll, GEHS, to Frank Crouch, May 22, 1970, both from GEHS collections.

³² Letter from GEHS to Village of Glen Ellyn Board of Trustees, April 19, 1972, GEHS collections.

In addition to intervening in projects undertaken by other village groups, GEHS members introduced programs intended to influence the meaning conveyed by Glen Ellyn's built environment. For example, two years after the GEHS opened, society representatives unveiled plaques at five historic local buildings as part of the GEHS' new historic marker program. The plaques celebrated each building's date of construction, as well as their ties to local "pioneer[s]." Society leaders, including president Leland Marks, founding president Blythe Kaiser, and local historian Dorothy Vandercook, established the program to, in Marks' words, "serve to make the village residents more aware of the wonderful heritage and early history that is connected with Glen Ellyn and vicinity." They made their inaugural choices on "the basis of age, location, proximity to each other, and their location near a main traffic area where they will become familiar to village residents and visitors." Marks added, "We selected this first group because...they are of an early period and have a lot of history connected with them." Society leaders emphasized and venerated the role nineteenth century residents played in Glen Ellyn's development each time they chose and unveiled a new plaque. By marking each property in such a visual way, they helped saturate Glen Ellyn's built environment with reminders of Glen Ellyn's earliest years.³³

GEHS founders and members continued to restore Stacy's Tavern throughout this period, eventually opening it to the public on July 3, 1976. Glen Ellyn village president Connie Zimmerman articulated Stacy's Tavern's historic significance in her comments during the dedication. "The same spirit of self-help," she said, "working together and when necessary,

³³ "Glen Ellyn Historical Society to Mark Historic Homes," *Glen Ellyn News*, April 26, 1972; and "Historical Society Marks First Group of Five Homes with Plaques," *Glen Ellyn News*, June 14, 1972, both from GEHS collections; Historic Preservation Graduate Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "Before It's Too Late: Protecting the Character of Glen Ellyn;" Kaiser and Vandercook, 309.

getting your hands dirty, that enabled our country's pioneers to build the world's richest nation" and local commitment to the restoration "demonstrated vividly that community spirit coupled with civic pride and concern for our nation's history..." The property's historic significance was also exemplified by its placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, as well as its designation as a state landmark the same year. GEHS members applied for and secured both designations. In addition to the honor of national recognition (Dorothy Vandercook noted that "there are four times as many applicants as landmarks officially chosen") and status as "the first building in DuPage County so honored," Stacy's Tavern's placement on the National Register meant that "the village can receive 50 per cent matching federal funds (through grants) for...[its] costly restoration." Dorothy Vandercook remarked, "We hope that some day Stacy's Tavern and Glen Ellyn will become synonymous." In a period of less than ten years, GEHS members transformed Stacy's Tavern from a run-down private residence into a nationally recognized historic property protected by village leaders and publicly celebrated as a defining element of Glen Ellyn's identity.³⁴

GEHS members restored Stacy's Tavern and celebrated Glen Ellyn's oldest homes, "pioneer" residents, and formative institution to generate village-wide support for local heritage among Glen Ellyn residents. GEHS members used this influence to intervene in municipal decision-making processes about the built environment at a time when village leaders grappled with how to manage new development stemming from unprecedented population growth. By

³⁴ Certificate of placement on National Register of Historic Places, September 4, 1974; Tom Jones, "Glen Ellyn landmark Stacy's Tavern on side of road again," *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 3, 1974; Letter from Kathleen Wolff, GEHS, to Judy Muntz, The Lee Phillip Show, WWHM-TV Chicago, August 14, 1974; "Stacy's Tavern Wins National Recognition," source unknown, October 31, 1974; "Stacy's Tavern Named National Historical Site," *Glen Ellyn News*, October 16, 1974; all from GEHS collections; and Helen W. Ward and Robert W. Chambers, *Glen Ellyn: A Village Remembered* (Glen Ellyn, IL: Glen Ellyn Historical Society, 1999), 336.

insisting village leaders protect Glen Ellyn’s historic landscapes, retain the “village atmosphere,” and limit large residential developments, they created and used heritage to define what constituted acceptable residential growth in Glen Ellyn, effectively limiting newcomer access to their community. The GEHS relationship with the village of Glen Ellyn certainly helped their cause—after all, the village board formed the Historic Sites Commission, which in turn formed the GEHS, to support local historic preservation and protect Glen Ellyn’s small-town aesthetic. In turn, GEHS leadership intervened in the village’s master plan process to ensure the village board protected what came before. The village’s “first master plan,” adopted in 1972, reflected GEHS concern for heritage and “include[d] creation of the Architectural Review Commission to review construction of public, commercial, business, and multi-family buildings, and the adoption of the Appearance Guide and Criteria Ordinance.” And in 1976, the village board “drafted its second comprehensive plan, which focused on preserving and improving the downtown and keeping the village’s unique character and quality.” The village board and GEHS leadership shared the belief that protecting the “village’s unique character and quality” provided a guide for how to move forward at a critical point in the village’s history.³⁵

Historical society founders and members in Rogers Park and Cicero did not achieve the same level of success as their counterparts in Glen Ellyn. The effort to organize a historical society in Rogers Park fell apart within two years. The Historical Society of Cicero met its primary goal—taking ownership over the Western Electric museum—and stayed open until at least the mid-1990s, but ultimately ended up shutting down as well. In Rogers Park, Howard Ure, Lily Venson, Robert Fields, Rene Sutor and other RPHS founders spent most of the

³⁵ Historic Preservation Graduate Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 10-11.

society's short life trying to figure out where to house the organization. They established relationships with local leaders, including Alderman Wigoda and members of the Rogers Park Community Council, and may have succeeded in using the historical society to influence planning efforts in Rogers Park had they managed to survive longer. The city's decision to encourage private historic preservation, instead of purchasing and maintaining historic properties with public money, meant historical societies in Chicago could not rely on municipal largesse for preservation projects, as in Glen Ellyn. Rogers Park Historical Society founders hoped they could convince the city to purchase the Sampson House under the newly expanded preservation ordinance, but Wigoda decided to take preservation in Rogers Park in a different direction.

Like their counterparts in Glen Ellyn, RPHS founders used "love of place" histories to build a network of people who supported their efforts to save the Sampson House. In 1968, RPHS founders justified their attempts to save the Sampson House by calling it a "landmark home...situated in an area which abounds in historical significance...the first school room was established just west." They further bolstered their claims to the home's importance by explaining that its "family line goes back to [early settler] Edward Murphy...the street which ends in front of the house...was originally Murphy Street, in his honor." They adopted a similar approach when they lost the Sampson house and began considering opening their historical society in the Pottawattomie Park fieldhouse. Robert Fields proposed covering the room's entrance with a wood and brick façade meant to mimic the exterior of a historic structure, complete with a "gas lamp reproduction" on either side of the door. Inside, Fields suggested a medallion of cobblestone set into the floor. He also proposed naming "meeting rooms or corridors...for streets or community founders, with respective documents and photos displayed on their walls." RPHS founders believed their home needed to make people "feel good about

place” by connecting residents with, according to Fields, “The pioneers of the area...[who] planted the seeds of...[local] pride...” Working through a historical society provided RPHS founders with a way to mobilize history in service to local boosterism and support broader local efforts to make Rogers Park a safe and desirable place to live.³⁶

RPHS founders tried, and failed, to establish a local history organization that could participate in conversations about Rogers Park’s future, but their work did not end when the society failed to materialize. Howard Ure and Lily Venson, for example, took particular interest in the battle over the future of the Edgewater Golf Club property, located a block west of Rogers Park’s western border in neighboring West Ridge. The Edgewater Golf Club debate began in the early 1960s, when the club’s owners decided to put the property up for sale. In response, the Rogers Park Community Council, the Edgewater Community Council, and the North Town Community Council banded together to form the Allied North Side Community Organization (ANSCO) in 1964, pledging to “to keep the 92-acre Edgewater Golf Course out of the hands of developers.” Venson and Ure, as well as members of ANSCO, worried about the golf club property for many of the same reasons RPHS founders banded together to save the Sampson House. In both cases, new construction proposed by their respective developers threatened to disrupt “the character of the community.” The golf club developers proposed a new residential and commercial complex for the site, but ANSCO wanted to increase the amount of recreational space available to West Ridge and Rogers Park residents by turning the property into a public park. Developers purchased the property but, after a decade of back-and-forth, ANSCO and its supporters won their crusade and the former Edgewater Golf Club opened to the public as

³⁶ “Edward Murphy,” RP/WRHS History Wiki, https://rpwrhs.org/w/index.php?title=Murphy,_Edward, accessed November 2019; Lily Venson, “Move begins to save house;” “Question still remains: Where to put the collection?”; and “Meeting Thursday: RP Historical society makes plans for home.”

Warren Park. Lily Venson's coverage of the Edgewater Golf Club story over a period of ten years led to her nomination for a Pulitzer Prize for contributions to journalism.³⁷

To the people involved in the RPHS and the Edgewater Golf Club debate, their attempts to preserve the Sampson House and turn the golf club into a public park belonged to the same effort to improve the residential experience in Rogers Park. They encouraged property owners to maintain their buildings and prevent decay from turning into blight, supported efforts to decrease the residential population in high-density areas, and worked to increase the amount of recreational space available to Rogers Park residents in order to make "Rogers Park a good place to live and work." RPHS founders mobilized history in service to these efforts, believing their organization could provide a place where the past, according to Robert Fields, could "...promote progressive action in the development of Rogers Park as a vital part of a great city." They believed the past had a role to play in efforts to improve life for Rogers Park residents, and hoped "love of place" would help, to quote Carol Kammen, "keep people there." Using history to support residential stability provided them with a way to try and influence who had access to Rogers Park and stave off demographic change. Ultimately, attempts by RPHS founders to bring

³⁷ In 1974, Alderman Paul Wigoda was "convicted of failing to report on his taxes a \$50,000 payment he received in connection with the rezoning of the former Edgewater golf club property." The property had been "zoned as residential," but "he had it rezoned for high-rises and business uses, thus increasing its value by millions of dollars." Wigoda denied ever having accepted a bribe from the developers to support the property's rezoning but was found guilty and went to prison in early 1976. See Leon Despres, *Challenging the Daley Machine: A Chicago Alderman's Memoir* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 107; and "Wigoda, facing prison, gets week's extension," *The Sunday Star*, January 4, 1976 and Dennis Fisher, "Ald. Wigoda gets one year for fraud," *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 3, 1974, both from Lily Pagratis Venson Papers. Welter, 94; Kay Catlin, "Jewish Presence a Force for Good in Rogers Park," *Chicago Tribune*, April 3, 1985; <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-04-03-8501190187-story.html>, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, November 2018; Ann Plunkett, "Edgewater Plan Opposed: Promise Court Fight to Stop Development," *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1967, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, June 2018; and Inventory of the Lily Pagratis Venson Papers, https://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml_files/Venson.xml, accessed April 2019.

local history to this process failed, though interest in mobilizing the past would manifest in a second (and more successful) attempt to establish a local historical society a few years later.³⁸

The Historical Society of Cicero also closed, though it managed to survive for well over a decade before shutting down. Like Rogers Park and Glen Ellyn Historical Society members, HSC members also crafted historical narratives meant to encourage “love of place” among residents and bring together a network of people who would support historical society projects. Robert Malinski, a retired Hawthorne Works employee and HSC vice-president, shared histories meant to instill “love of place” in the society’s newsletter, which the HSC published two to four times per year. He and his co-editors included information about, for example, the “richest woman in the United States,” who owned the land on which the town of Cicero later built three schools, the Goodwin school, which “has the prestige of being the oldest school,” and the town of Cicero’s first trustees. Forming a historical society also provided HSC founders with a way to explore and define Cicero’s white ethnic legacy as the population of Hispanic people began to overwhelm the disappearing white ethnic majority. HSC members filled their newsletters and programs with information that demonstrated the importance of the white ethnic community to Cicero’s formation and development. They wrote about, for example, “the first Polish settler...Valentine (King) Ceranek” and Anton Maciejewski, the first Ciceronian elected to Congress and described the white ethnic origins of Cicero’s schools, churches, and local organizations, and the ways they updated and improved Cicero’s roads, public buildings, sewer and water systems, and sidewalks. They provided a new kind of community space for white

³⁸ Lily Venson, “RPCC needs \$\$ aid”; and Carol Kammen, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, August 7, 2017. The second Rogers Park Historical Society—now the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society—is one of two historical societies considered in chapter 3. At least three people joined both the first and second efforts to form a historical society in Rogers Park: Howard Ure, Jackie McNicol, and Lily Venson.

ethnics and their descendants where they worked to define their own legacy and claim ownership over Ciceronian identity.³⁹

Despite their efforts, the HSC board never managed to establish a significant presence in the lives of Cicero residents. They succeeded in keeping the Hawthorne Works collection in Cicero but failed to demonstrate broader local relevance after achieving their first major goal. HSC newsletter co-editor Robert Malinski's appeals to Cicero residents for support reflect the society's reaction to rapid local demographic change in the years following the society's acquisition of the Hawthorne Works collection. By the early 1990s, society leaders could not retain existing members, let alone recruit new ones, and in 1991 Robert Malinski reported "only an average of 12 members...the same 12 members" in attendance at society meetings and programs. Additionally, Malinski wrote, the society was operating "without a treasurer or full board of directors," and they did "not even have a quorum of board members to conduct society business." He implored readers, "It would be disheartening to see the society become a part of history and lose our memories and heritage, which belong to our children and grandchildren." Too few Ciceronians supported the Historical Society of Cicero's efforts for it to remain viable for much longer.⁴⁰

In addition to a lack of support from the HSC's primary audience, two serious blows hastened the HSC's closure. First, rising school enrollments threatened the society's tenancy in Morton East High School. The society board and high school administration signed a lease contract in 1985 when the society first moved the Western Electric museum to the high school,

³⁹ Historical Society of Cicero newsletter: *Backtracks* 1 (1) 1985; *Backtracks* 1 (3) 1986; *Backtracks* 1 (4) 1986; *Backtracks* 2 (1) 1986; *Backtracks* 2 (2) 1986; *Backtracks*, 2 (4) 1987; and Jeffrey Steele, "Historical Society volunteers keep museum connected to times," all from HSC collections.

⁴⁰ *Backtracks* 6 (1) 1991, HSC collections.

but the board felt that their residency there would be temporary. They formed a task force charged with finding a new space for their museum in 1987 but the society was still located in the high school well into the 1990s, suggesting the task force failed to find a new space, gave up on the effort, or reached a new agreement with the school. The second blow came when several long-time society leaders passed away in the mid-to-late 1990s. Robert Malinski and Marie Newell died in 1996, and Norma Zbasnik followed in 1998. Elaine Malinski, Robert's wife and a long-time co-editor of the society newsletter, also died in 1996, just two months after her husband. There was no one left willing to undertake the work done by Zbasnik, Malinski, and Newell for so long and their deaths likely contributed significantly to the society's closure.⁴¹

HSC founders opened the society's doors to a dwindling audience of white ethnics and used their resources to build an origin story for Cicero centered around white ethnic achievement. They created an imagined legacy in which they tied the founding and development of Cicero and its institutions to white ethnic families, effectively claiming ownership over Cicero's past in an attempt to elevate white ethnics in local memory. They could not, at that point, act to limit the in-migration of Hispanic people into Cicero. But they did use the historical society to construct an imagined community bounded and defined by a shared commitment to the white ethnic legacy in Cicero—a community inaccessible to Cicero's Hispanic newcomers, and in which their stories had no role to play.

⁴¹ Today, Cicero's Morton College operates a "Hawthorne Works Museum" and is in possession of a collection similar to the one given to the Historical Society of Cicero by Western Electric. It is possible that Morton College acquired the Historical Society of Cicero's Hawthorne Works collection sometime after the historical society's dissolution, but unverifiable at this time as Morton College has not responded to inquiries about the origins of the college's Hawthorne Works collection.; "Use agreement" between Historical Society of Cicero and Morton East High School, February 11, 1985; Gail Siwek, "Society keeps museum intact," *The Life*, May 20, 1994; *Backtracks* 11 (3) 1996, all from HSC collections; and "Norma F. Zbasnik," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1998, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, March 2019.

Residents in Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero formed local historical societies in response to preservation crises facing their communities. Rogers Park Historical Society founders hoped to save the Sampson House and turn it into the society's new headquarters while their counterparts in Glen Ellyn restored Stacy's Tavern. And, in Cicero, HSC founders took ownership over Western Electric's Hawthorne Works collection and opened a museum dedicated to its legacy. In each case, historical society founders claimed authority over the local past and used it to create histories meant to help residents "feel good about place" and build a network of members ready to support their preservation projects.

Working through local historical societies also provided residents in Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero with a way to respond to the factors that created their preservation problems in the first place. RPHS founders used local history to support efforts by local leaders to make Rogers Park a more attractive place to live and maintain a stable residential population, which they hoped would help prevent the in-migration of economically disadvantaged people from other areas of Chicago. GEHS founders used local history to influence proposed changes to Glen Ellyn's built environment, maintain a village aesthetic, and argue against high-density housing developments, effectively limiting residential growth. Finally, white ethnic Ciceronians used their historical society to create an imagined community for themselves in which Cicero owed everything to its white ethnic past even as their physical presence in Cicero faded.

The success of their endeavors varied, but each case reveals some of the ways people mobilized the past in reaction to immediate concerns about historic preservation. And, though founded in urgency, the historical societies in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero share a number of characteristics in common with local historical societies founded in response to other kinds of phenomena across the Chicagoland region, suggesting a common approach to local

history explored further in chapters three, four, and five. The similarities in their approaches demonstrate, as they did in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, and Cicero, how effective a tool the past can be when wielded by well-connected, white local boosters concerned about the future of their homeplaces.⁴²

⁴² The Glen Ellyn Historical Society is considered further in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE

“TALK ABOUT ITS GOOD POINTS...”: DIVERSITY, IDENTITY, AND LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES IN HYDE PARK AND ROGERS PARK, 1975-1996

In early 1996, *Chicago Tribune* journalist Dionne Searcey interviewed Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS) Executive Director Mary Jo Doyle, as well as several other Rogers Park residents, for an article about local diversity on Chicago’s far north side. “These days,” Searcey wrote, “the Far North Side area known as Rogers Park/West Ridge is one of the most racially, ethnically and religiously mixed communities in the city.” She noted how distinctive that was in a “city where...new residents have settled into homogenous neighborhoods and segregation has an ugly legacy.” Not in Rogers Park or West Ridge, Searcey explained, which, as one resident said, “was a little more accepting than other neighborhoods.” A former resident said she “grew up with all ethnic groups around me” and “never knew what prejudice was.” When Searcey asked Doyle why so many ethnic groups moved to the area, Doyle “cited the area’s location for its cross-cultural appeal.” Rogers Park has street-end beaches open to all, “the train stops make it easy to reach downtown in minutes. And housing...is cheaper...than in neighborhoods closer to the loop,” Doyle explained. At that time, the most recent census numbers, recorded in 1990, reported a white population totaling 55% of the overall population, with the remainder split unevenly between black, Latino, and South Asian people.¹

¹ Dionne Searcey, “In Rogers Park, all are welcome,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 22, 1996, accessed via ProQuest, May 2019. The quote in the chapter title was drawn from Mary Jo Doyle’s spring 1987 “From the President” note in the *RPHS Newsletter* (Vol. 2 No. 2). The only responsibility of RPHS members, she wrote, was to “talk about [Rogers Park’s] good points.”

Today, Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society board members and volunteers continue to celebrate the local diversity discussed by Doyle, Searcey, and other residents in 1996. In the RP/WRHS' recent cookbook, titled *The World in One Neighborhood: The Varied Cuisines of Chicago's Far North Side*, they explained that Rogers Park and West Ridge "are among the most ethnically and culturally diverse neighborhoods in the city, and perhaps even the nation." The cookbook highlights this diversity by sharing recipes submitted by current and former residents and local businesses that, together, "reflect a cornucopia of cultures from around the world." RP/WRHS members are not the only residents to speak warmly about local diversity. Northside Community Resources, the descendent of the Rogers Park Community Council, claims a "mission...to build and strengthen communities among the diverse populations of Chicago's North Side." Local journalist Linze Rice reported in 2018 that "Rogers Park presently holds the distinction of being the city's most diverse neighborhood," and that "in West Ridge or Rogers Park, it's not uncommon to pass folks who hail from around the world on any given day." Today, diversity—racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural—is the norm in these two neighborhoods and a central component of local identity.²

While racial and ethnic diversity are defining elements of Rogers Park and West Ridge today, this was not always the case. Changes to the racial and ethnic makeup of the local population were both drastic and quick—Rogers Park's white population decreased from 99.3% in 1960 and 91.7% in 1970 to 54.7% in 1990 and 43.1% in 2017, and in West Ridge the white

² "Chicago's 49th Ward," <https://www.49thward.org/resources>; "Northside Community Resources," <https://www.northsidecommunityresources.org/>; and Linze Rice, "Chicago's Racist Housing Rules: How Early Laws Stalled Diversity," *DNAInfo*, May 19, 2016, <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160519/rogers-park/chicagos-racist-housing-rules-how-early-laws-stalled-diversity/>; all accessed June 2019; and RP/WRHS, *The World in One Neighborhood: The Varied Cuisines of Chicago's Far North Side* (Chicago, IL: RP/WRHS, 2017). The Rogers Park Community Council is considered in more detail in chapter two.

population decreased from 99.7% in 1960 to 76.9% in 1990 and 42.2% in 2017 (see tables 9 and 10). The demographic shift on Chicago's far north side was particularly acute after about 1970. The first attempt to form a historical society in Rogers Park failed by late 1969 or early 1970, but residents tried again a few years later, determined to capture stories and artifacts from white ethnics residents whose families had constituted the local majority for so long. Significantly, and perhaps paradoxically, efforts by RP/WRHS members to negotiate a place for white ethnics on Chicago's far north side helped produce the diverse local identity celebrated by so many today.³

This chapter considers the history and impact of two local historical societies—the second Rogers Park Historical Society (RPHS) and the Hyde Park Historical Society (HPHS)—established in the mid-1970s in response to significant increases in racial and ethnic diversity in their neighborhoods. Though located seventeen miles apart, and on opposite ends of the city of Chicago (see figure 4), historical society founders in both places shared concerns about population fluctuations and demographic shifts in their neighborhoods and the connection between racial and ethnic change and urban decay. But by the late twentieth century, local leaders in both areas claimed the distinction of being among a select number of Chicago-area communities in which residents had managed to integrate without conflict. White neighborhoods in other parts of Chicago struggled to accommodate racial and ethnic change, they claimed, but

³ Rogers Park and part of West Ridge are located in—and occupy the entirety of—Chicago's forty-ninth ward. The remainder of West Ridge is in Chicago's fiftieth ward. The local historical society considered in this chapter was founded as the Rogers Park Historical Society in 1975 and is a different organization than the Rogers Park Historical Society founded in 1968 and discussed in chapter two. The RPHS founded in 1975, which still exists today, considered the part of West Ridge located north of Devon Avenue, which is the majority of West Ridge and known to some as "West Rogers Park," to be an unofficial part of its mandate from the beginning. This changed in 1987, when the RPHS decided to take on the entirety of West Ridge, including the part situated south of Devon Avenue. RPHS members voted to change the society's name to the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS) in 1993 to better reflect their commitment to both Rogers Park and West Ridge. In this chapter, the society will be referred to as the RPHS until 1993 and the RP/WRHS thereafter. See *RPHS Newsletter* Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1987 and Vol. VIII, No. 2, Spring-Summer 1993, RP/WRHS collections, Chicago, IL.

not Hyde Park, Rogers Park, and West Ridge. In the intervening years, HPHS and RPHS founders, like their counterparts in Glen Ellyn and Cicero, as well as Rogers Parkers involved in the first attempt to establish a local historical society, mobilized local history in response to neighborhood change. They believed working through local historical societies allowed them to approach issues related to demographic change, urban decay, and local identity from a new direction—one not available through any of their existing neighborhood associations. Their stories reveal how residents in Hyde Park, Rogers Park, and West Ridge used local history to craft positive, white-centric heritage narratives about local diversity, which they mobilized to build barriers around their communities and bring economic and residential stability to their homeplaces.

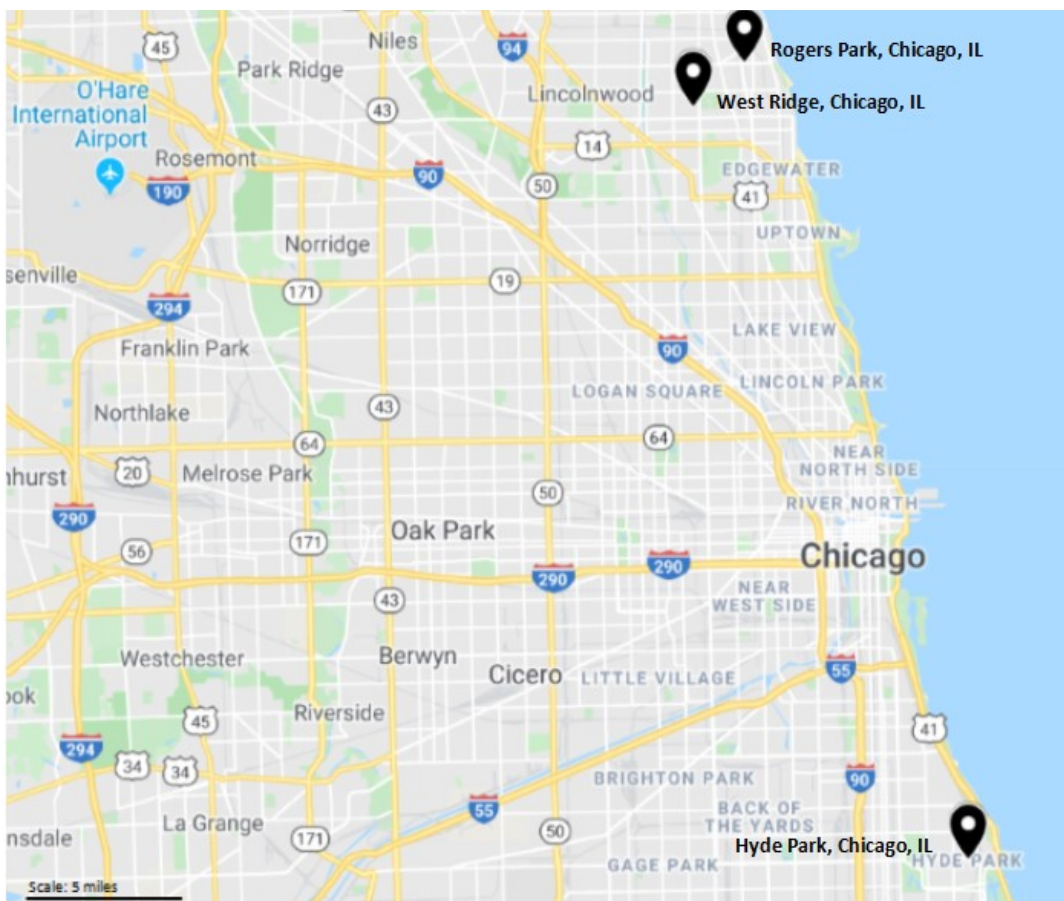


Figure 4. Map of Hyde Park, West Ridge, and Rogers Park in Chicago, IL.
Source: Base map from Google Maps.

Founding Moments

Hyde Park residents Clyde Watkins and Devereux Bowly had known each other for many years when, in 1974 or 1975, Watkins said to Bowly, “You know, we really ought to form an organization of people that are interested in seeking out the histories of their houses.” Historic houses were on Watkins’ mind. He had been renovating his historic Hyde Park home—he often ran into Bowly during his trips to the local hardware store—and he knew Bowly, a born-and-raised, third-generation Hyde Parker, was interested in architecture. “I wrote fairly often articles for a midwest magazine of the *Chicago Sun Times* about architecture. And so, among my acquaintances, they learned I was an architecture buff,” said Bowly. More than two decades later, at the 1999 Hyde Park Historical Society annual meeting, Watkins shared more about the HPHS’s founding story, saying he thought a historical society might be able to rehabilitate a specific historic building he believed was “headed for ruin.” “I always had a thing about that great little building,” Watkins said, “...but as I matured, I continued to watch the building through its subsequent incarnations and its decline.” A historical society could, he explained, “undertake the research and preservation of its [the neighborhood’s] past” and “house [the society] ...in my favorite structure.” It could serve residents interested in local history while simultaneously providing a means by which to rehabilitate a long-neglected local building.⁴

Bowly and Watkins, along with Vicky Ranney, Jean Block, and Albert Tannler, decided to hold a meeting to discuss “the idea of creating an organization to work for a better preservation and public awareness of our own local history.” Ranney, Block, and Tannler, like

⁴ Transcript for interview with Devereux Bowly for the Hyde Park Historical Society, October 21, 1998, and Sharla Fishhaut, “Dev Bowly: words and action on Chicago housing,” *Hyde Park Herald*, August 23, 1978, both from Hyde Park Historical Society (HPHS) Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; and “History So Soon? Pioneer Days of the Hyde Park Historical Society,” February 20, 1999, <http://www.hydeparkhistory.org/about-us-3/>, accessed May 2019.

Bowly and Watkins, were interested in Hyde Park's local history. Vicky Ranney served as chair of the Illinois Humanities Council and was associate editor of the Frederick Law Olmstead papers. Jean Block was the archivist at the University of Chicago library, Hyde Park's largest institution, as well as a local architecture expert, and was working on her book *Hyde Park Houses: An Informal History, 1956-1910* when the earliest conversations about forming a local historical society began. Albert Tannler worked as assistant curator of special collections at the University of Chicago and, according to Clyde Watkins, "at that time [1975]" had just completed the first edition of *One in Spirit*, the pictorial history of the University [of Chicago]." The group met at Jean Block's apartment at 1700 East 56th Street and, after some discussion, decided to circulate their idea to form a historical society among a larger group of residents.⁵

In preparation for their next meeting, set for January 13, 1976 at Ranney's Hyde Park home, Bowly, Watkins, Ranney, Block, and Tannler prepared a statement explaining how a local historical society in Hyde Park could serve area residents. A Hyde Park-Kenwood Historical Society, they explained, "would establish an archives of historical materials...keep a record of where other pertinent materials are located... oversee...a definitive history of the area...oversee the design of a high school curriculum in local history...have a membership of area residents and others...who would participate in workshops to learn how to trace the title (and history if possible) of the address where they currently live...[and] work with the city of Chicago

⁵ Vicky Ranney was also co-founder of Friends of the Parks, an independent group formed in 1975 to advocate for "reform of the [Chicago] Park District." See "How Friends of the Parks Got Started," <https://fotp.org/about/history/>, accessed July 2019; Undated letter, probably late 1975, HPHS collection; Bowly interview transcript; and Dennis Rodkin, "Landed Gentry," *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1999, accessed via ProQuest; University of Chicago Library, "Guide to the Jean F. Block Papers 1980s," <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.BLOCKJF>, and National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District, 1973, https://archive.org/stream/NationalRegisterNominationsForChicago/HydePark-kenwoodNrNom2_djvu.txt, all accessed May 2019.

Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks in designating landmark buildings and districts in the area.” The original cohort was joined at the January meeting by six additional residents and together they discussed “the possible scope of such a society” and where they would conduct society business. Not everyone agreed with Watkins’ idea to house the organization in his favorite local building, which they then believed was an “old Illinois Central Railroad Station,” because they feared it “might be too demanding financially.” But they did agree to continue the conversation at a second meeting set for March 2, at which point they decided to organize their first public meeting in May.⁶

Hoping to draw a large crowd to their first public meeting, Watkins and Block spoke with *Hyde Park Herald* journalist Cheryl Fries about the group’s goals in early May. They told Fries Hyde Park residents needed a historical society because “our present and future have their roots in our past” and a society provided Hyde Parkers with a way “of finding out just what those roots are.” This was especially crucial, they explained, given local population trends. “Old families are moving away, or giving away old photographs, documents and antiques,” Block explained, “[and] it would be so much more fitting to keep these things” in Hyde Park. Watkins said he also worried about “how little Hyde Parkers know about Hyde Park.” According to Watkins and Block, not only were old families moving away, but people living in Hyde Park knew very little about the neighborhood’s origins and history. They hoped a Hyde Park Historical Society could bring Hyde Park residents closer to the local past.⁷

⁶ HPHS founders considered naming their group the “Hyde Park-Kenwood Historical Society” but ultimately decided to drop Kenwood from the society’s official name. Hyde Park included Kenwood, they believed, and thus they had no reason to include Kenwood in the name.; Undated letter, probably late 1975, and minutes from the first meeting of residents interested in forming a Hyde Park-Kenwood Historical Society, January 13, 1976, both from the HPHS collection.

⁷ Cheryl Fries, “Bringing the Past into Present,” *Hyde Park Herald*, May 12, 1976, HPHS collection.

The *Hyde Park Herald* published Fries' article on May 12 and that evening more than two hundred people arrived at St. Thomas the Apostle school to learn more about plans to form a local historical society. Watkins spoke to the assembled group, explaining his vision for a historical society. It would "not be a 'passive' gathering source for the entertainment of its members nor a negative one which is held together by the bonds of nostalgia." Rather, a society would act "as an active umbrella organization; one which would not only collect, store and catalogue what is left of the priceless archival materials related to the community's history, but one which brings people...together to start a dialogue about the history which contributed to our community's uniqueness." Attendees also heard from Leon Despres, Hyde Park's powerful former alderman (he retired the year before). In his speech, titled "What's Past is Prologue: An Examination of the History of Hyde Park," Despres, a long-time Hyde Park resident, explained the important role such a group could play in their neighborhood. Local history provides residents, he said, with the knowledge of "what the forces were that made Hyde Park good and great, so that we can accentuate those forces in our present and our future." In addition, Despres explained, knowing what came before would help residents avoid repeating past mistakes.⁸

A few months after the May meeting, Muriel Beadle, Hyde Park resident and wife to former University of Chicago president George Beadle, called Devereux Bowly to ask what progress had been made in establishing a historical society since the meeting at St. Thomas'. Beadle was well-known in Hyde Park for her urban renewal activism in the 1950s and 1960s. She volunteered with the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference (HPKCC), "formed in

⁸ Despres served as fifth ward (including Hyde Park) Alderman from 1955 to 1975. See Leon Despres, *Challenging the Daley Machine: A Chicago Alderman's Memoir* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005) for more about Despres' political career, including his involvement with urban renewal in Hyde Park. "Plenty of HP Enthusiasm," *The Hyde Park Herald*, May 19, 1976; and Leon Despres, "What's Past is Prologue," May 12, 1976, both from HPHS collection.

1949 to stem growing physical decay of neighborhoods and to promote better race relations in the community,” chaired the HPKCC’s Committee for a Cleaner Community, and led the Harper Court project, which aimed “to replace artists’ quarters lost to urban renewal [in Hyde Park] and provide space for new galleries and ‘creative enterprises’.” She also wrote two memoirs chronicling her experiences in Hyde Park: *The Hyde Park-Kenwood Urban Renewal Years* in 1964 and *Where Has All the Ivy Gone*, in which she reflects on the University of Chicago’s relationship to urban renewal and redevelopment in Hyde Park, in 1972. Describing their 1976 phone call, Bowly said, “...I’d met her once or twice but I didn’t know her. And...she said, ‘You know, nothing’s happened since the public meeting of the historical society. How would you like it if I took over?’ Or something to that effect...and so...she’s the one that really then caused it to be organized...after that St. Thomas meeting, she reinvigorated it...” On November 22, 1976, Muriel and George Beadle hosted the first official meeting of the Hyde Park Historical Society at their Hyde Park home. Among those present were most of the members of the original group, including Devereux Bowly, Clyde Watkins, Jean Block, Al Tannler, Tom Jensen, who had helped Clyde Watkins organize the meeting at St. Thomas, Thelma and Albert Dahlberg, a University of Chicago anthropologist, and Rory Shanley. The group elected Beadle to serve as the historical society’s first president.⁹

HPHS founders began work on a robust agenda at their November meeting. Clyde

⁹ George Beadle was University of Chicago president from 1961 until 1968. See “Guide to the George Wells Beadle Papers, 1908-1981,” University of Chicago Library, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.BEADLEG>, accessed April 2019; Bowly interview transcript; and Wolfgang Saxon, “Albert A. Dahlberg, An Anthropologist And a Dentist, 84,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1993; and “The University of Chicago Centennial Catalogues,” University of Chicago Library, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/university-chicago-centennial-catalogues/university-and-city-centennial-view-university-chicago/university-neighborhood/renewal-and-revival>; “Welcome to the Hyde Park Historical Society,” <http://www.hydeparkhistory.org/about-us-3/>; and “Guide to the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference Records 1895-2011,” University of Chicago Library, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.HPKCC>, all accessed April 2019.

Watkins agreed to draw up by-laws for the new board and to contact Leon Despres, who returned to his law practice at the end of his final term as alderman, to discuss pursuing incorporation for the historical society. The new board also decided at this meeting “that the [current] Alderman of the Fifth Ward be named an ex-officio member of the Board.” Every person present left the Beadle home that evening having taken charge over one of the HPHS’ new standing committees. Devereux Bowly agreed to lead the Education Committee, and “plan...one event...[maybe] a tour of historical homes” for HPHS members. Jean Block and Al Tannler, who both worked for special collections at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library, took charge over the “Acquisition and Research” committee and committed to “establish[ish] a repository for the Society’s collections.” The group already maintained an “informal relationship with Special Collections at Regenstein,” likely through their association with Block and Tannler, and Tannler agreed to “explore [this relationship] further.” The board also discussed the possibility of establishing a research subcommittee within Block and Tannler’s jurisdiction, under which the society would investigate the “research resources available within the community” and look into “developing an oral history program.” Beyond research and education, Tom Jensen took over responsibility for publicity, Malcolm Collier did the same for membership, and Thelma Dahlberg agreed to arrange “all general meetings of the Society.” After a year of planning, the HPHS was finally operational.¹⁰

In mid-1975, at about the same time Watkins, Bowly, and other Hyde Parkers began to discuss opening a local historical society in their neighborhood, Kathie and Denis Paluch initiated a similar conversation in Rogers Park. Though Kathie grew up elsewhere, some of her

¹⁰ “Minutes of Board Meeting,” Hyde Park Historical Society, November 22, 1976, HPHS collection.

maternal family members had lived in the neighborhood and she attended and graduated from Rogers Park's Mundelein College in the 1960s. She began working for Denis' family's Rogers Park printing company during her senior year at Mundelein and she and Denis eventually married and settled in Rogers Park on the 1800 block of Lunt Avenue. The Paluchs began meeting with other residents to talk about local history in the early 1970s, not long after the first Rogers Park Historical Society disbanded. Kathie Paluch recalled, "Our first meetings... we just sat and talked... We didn't have a formal plan or anything. We just wanted to preserve the stories about the neighborhood." They continued to gather informally until 1975, when they published a notice in the local paper "inviting neighbors to discuss local history" at the Rogers Park branch of the Chicago Public Library.¹¹

The Paluchs published their invitation because they worried about change unfolding in their part of the neighborhood. Denis recalled, "At that time part of...our interest went towards the history side because a lot of the Victorians were being torn down." Kathie agreed, adding that developers had replaced Victorian-era homes with modern townhouses across from their home on Lunt Avenue. In addition, Kathie explained, "We...needed to figure out a way to keep some of the stories that people were talking about. The neighborhood was changing." In addition to the growing in-migration of non-white people, many of Rogers Park's older, long-term residents were passing or moving away and the Paluchs wanted to save their stories about Rogers Park's past. Kathie recalled, "A lot of people would stop and come in [our house] ...and tell stories. One of them was Irwin St. John Tucker, who was called Friar Tuck...[He] was in the

¹¹ "Mission and History," <https://rpwrhs.org/history/>, accessed June 2019; and Kathie and Denis Paluch, interviewed by Dona Vitale and Cliff Zimmerman for the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, audio recording, June 23, 2015; and Rita Rousseau, "Life in Rogers Park: Area's history leads to Doyle's basement," publication unknown, March 1988, both from RP/WRHS collections, Chicago, IL.

neighborhood long before we got here...His wife was connected to the Pottawatomie Indian tribe [and]...he would tell us these stories about Rogers Park that were just fascinating.” Bringing together a group of people interested in local history seemed like a good way, they believed, to “write down some of the stories we were hearing” before the people telling them passed away or left the neighborhood.¹²

In attendance at the July 28, 1975 meeting were Denis and Kathie Paluch, Jeanette Statland, Mervyn Ruskow, Lee Schroeder, Albert Weimeskirch, Mary Jo Doyle and her mother Dorothy, Mark Lukowitz, and at least two people—Howard Ure and Jackie McNicol—involved in the failed 1968 attempt by Rogers Park residents to form a historical society. The new society held public meetings twice a month at the Rogers Park library while they continued “organizing and setting goals...” One of the first things they did was extend an invitation to Friar Tuck to “reminise [sic] about the Rogers Park he knew...” He “spoke about the national historical influence Rogers Park played...and promised to return to future meetings to discuss his close relations with the Indians of the area.” Denis Paluch remembered being “nominated as the first president, which [he] quickly passed on...to Mark Lukowitz” and finally, when “the group decided to continue meeting as a regular organization,” to Mary Jo Doyle, a life-long local resident then in her mid-thirties.¹³

Now formalized, RPHS leadership decided to pursue a wider array of activities. They

¹² Paluch interview.

¹³ Incidentally, Mary Jo Doyle’s mother Dorothy was born Dorothy Sampson and was likely related to the Sampson family whose home the first Rogers Park Historical Society was formed to save. The first attempt, in 1968, to form a Rogers Park Historical Society is considered further in chapter 2.; Trevor Jensen, “Mary Jo Doyle: 1939-2007,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 23, 2007, accessed April 2019; Rousseau; Paluch interview; and *RPHS Newsletter* Vol. 10 No. 3 1995; RP/WRHS, “Millennium Time Capsule,” December 19, 2002; and “Community Activities,” unnamed local paper, August 6, 1975, all from RP/WRHS collections.

successfully incorporated on March 17, 1976 with the stated mission “to gather and preserve the history of the area known as Rogers Park...[and] to foster and perpetuate interest in the history of the area...” The board began collecting historic items, papers, and other memorabilia, beginning with a collection of old photographs given to the society by Weimeskirch, who owned a local funeral home, and stored in Doyle’s home. The Paluchs gradually scaled back their involvement and Mary Jo Doyle quickly became the driving force behind the historical society. Doyle worked with RPHS members to organize a local antiques show in December 1976, establish a “permanent display located at the branch library on Clark Street,” produce “‘Story Swap,’ [a] video production of old timers of the area reminiscing,” and hold an “open meetin[g]” to record even more local stories. They also encouraged current and former residents to “look in attics and scrapbooks for items” to donate to the society’s growing collection. A RPHS representative, likely Doyle, described additional goals during a visit to a Rogers Park Community Council meeting on March 15, 1978. RPHS leadership hoped to organize a “walking tour of Rogers Park, featuring visits to old historical homes” and “trips to other historical societies,” and were then in the process of “producing, with the assistance of Loyola University personnel, a video taping of the history of the area by decades” in celebration of the centennial of Rogers Park’s 1878 incorporation as a village. During this time, and for many years after, the RPHS met twice a month at the Rogers Park branch library.¹⁴

¹⁴ Paluch interview; Jensen; “Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society,” RP/WRHS *History Wiki*, https://rpwrhs.org/w/index.php?title=Rogers_Park/West_Ridge_Historical_Society; and “Rogers Park,” RP/WRHS *History Wiki*, https://rpwrhs.org/w/index.php?title=Rogers_Park, both accessed May 2019; “Rogers Park Historical Society presentation to Rogers Park Community Council,” March 15, 1978, RP/WRHS collections; and Margaret Carroll, “Chicago: Great Society of neighborhood histories,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1981, accessed via ProQuest, April 2019.

Amid Neighborhood Change

Hyde Park, Rogers Park, and West Ridge residents who helped to establish their respective local historical societies did so in response to demographic change in their neighborhoods. They were not alone—both historical societies joined other area community organizations working to mitigate the destabilizing effects wrought by population migrations. Many HPHS founders lived in Hyde Park during the postwar in-migration of black Chicagoans from adjacent South Side communities and participated in subsequent urban renewal efforts intended to slow both black in-migration and consequent white flight out of Hyde Park. They believed they could use local history to protect Hyde Park against future incidents of decay and urban renewal. RPHS founders took a similar approach, believing a local historical society could help retain white ethnic residents worried about their place in a neighborhood growing more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse with each passing year. Surveys administered in Rogers Park in 1976 and 1980 by the Loyola University Chicago Department of Sociology and sociology PhD student Gail Danks Welter captured some of this anxiety. Respondents tended to reply to the survey in one of two ways, with either a “general but vague positive feeling toward the community” or “more negative feelings about its perceived deterioration.” Significantly, the surveys found residents who lived in Rogers Park longer tended to feel more negatively about recent changes than newer residents. “Newer residents express[ed] more positive views on the community,” Welter wrote, and “these newer residents probably chose the community because they appreciated the increasing population heterogeneity.” But residents who lived in Rogers Park longer tended, according to Welter, to view “these changes as upsetting the status quo.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Gail Danks Welter, “The Effects of Demographic and Institutional change on the Image and Reputation of an Urban Community,” (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 1982), 49, 55-56, 137-138; Loyola University Chicago’s main campus is located in Rogers Park.; White concern about and reaction to demographic, and specifically racial change, in the metropolis has long been studied by historians. See, for example, M.P. Freund

The “status quo” noted by long-time Rogers Park residents consisted of large numbers of Jewish people, who “constituted the single largest nationality in [Rogers Park]...followed by Poles and Germans” from 1930 until about 1970, when the number of black and “Spanish-speaking” people, immigrants from South Asia, and Russian Jews from the Soviet Union began to increase significantly. Growing racial and ethnic diversity fueled an out-migration of Rogers Park’s Jewish and white ethnic residents to suburban Chicago, further disrupting the demographic status quo. The Jewish out-migration included people like Neal Samors, who explained in a 2001 article about his co-authored (with Mary Jo Doyle and two others) book, *Chicago’s Far North Side: An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and West Ridge*, how “he and other Jewish residents began moving to the suburbs [in about 1970], making room for the Indians and Pakistanis who now dominate Devon Avenue.” Among the white ethnic residents who stayed in Rogers Park and West Ridge were many of the people who founded the second RPHS in 1975.¹⁶

Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Freund demonstrates how “after World War II most northern whites justified racial exclusion [from their towns, cities, and neighborhoods] by invoking what they viewed as nonracial variables: protecting the housing market, their rights as property owners, and, linked to both, their rights as citizens. Whites still actively kept blacks out of their neighborhoods, yet insisted...that they were merely exercising what they described as the prerogatives of ‘homeowners’...” (8). Of particular interest to this study is how white residents formed associations through which to respond to racial change, which is not a phenomenon unique to Chicago. Thomas Sugrue, for example, explains how white homeowners in Detroit mobilized the “homeowners’ movement” in response to “economic dislocation and black migration” across Detroit, which “created a sense of crisis among homeowners. Both their economic interests and their communal identities were threatened. They turned to civic associations to defend a world that they feared was slipping away.” See Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 214.

¹⁶ Welter, 109-110; Welter attributed the “influx of...Russian Jews” from the Soviet Union to Rogers Park in the 1970s to the U.S.S.R. “chang[ing] its policy restricting the[ir] immigration.” Many moved to the “north side of Chicago [and] Rogers Park in particular” because of its “large Jewish concentration” (110). Dominic Pacyga and Ellen Skerrett, *Chicago: City of Neighborhoods, Histories and Tours* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986), 135-136; and Ted Kleine, “In Print: Neal Samors’s Rogers Park stories,” *Chicago Reader*, January 18, 2001, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/in-print-neal-samorss-rogers-park-stories/Content?oid=904410>, accessed May 2019.

Local population statistics for Rogers Park and West Ridge reveal the extent of demographic change at that time. Rogers Park's overall population increased modestly between 1960, when it had 56,888 residents, and 1970, when it had 60,781 residents, but dropped over the next ten years to 55,525 in 1980 before increasing again to 60,378 in 1990 and 63,484 in 2000 (see table 8). Significantly, the number of white residents declined precipitously during that same time frame, from 99% in 1960 and 91.7% in 1970 to 54.7% in 1990 and 31.8% in 2000, which likely accounts for the overall population decrease between 1970 and 1980. At the same time, between 1970 and 2000, the number of black residents increased from 0.1% of the population to 29.6%, Hispanic and Latino residents increased in number from zero to 27.8% of the population, and the number of South Asian residents increased from zero to 6.4% of the population (after peaking at 8.8% in 1990) (see table 9). By the year 2000, white residents no longer held a majority in Rogers Park and the situation was similar in neighboring West Ridge. The overall population increased between 1960 and 1970, from 63,884 to 65,463, but dropped between 1970 and 1980 to 56,133. It increased sometime after 1980, reaching 65,374 in 1990 and 73,199 in 2000. And as in Rogers Park, the white population decreased from 99.7% in 1960 to 76.9% in 1990 and 49.7% in 2000 while the Hispanic and Latino populations increased from 0 to 22.3%, the black population from 0.1 to 6.8%, and the South Asian population from 0 to 22.3% during the same time frame (see table 10).¹⁷

¹⁷ Welter 71-72; Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Rogers Park," *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1086.html>, and "West Ridge," *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1341.html>, both accessed May 2019; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Community Data Snapshot" for Rogers Park, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/Rogers+Park.pdf>, and West Ridge, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/West+Ridge.pdf>, both accessed July 2019; and census data drawn from John McCarron and Stanley Ziembra, "City black areas growing: census," *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1981, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, November 2019.

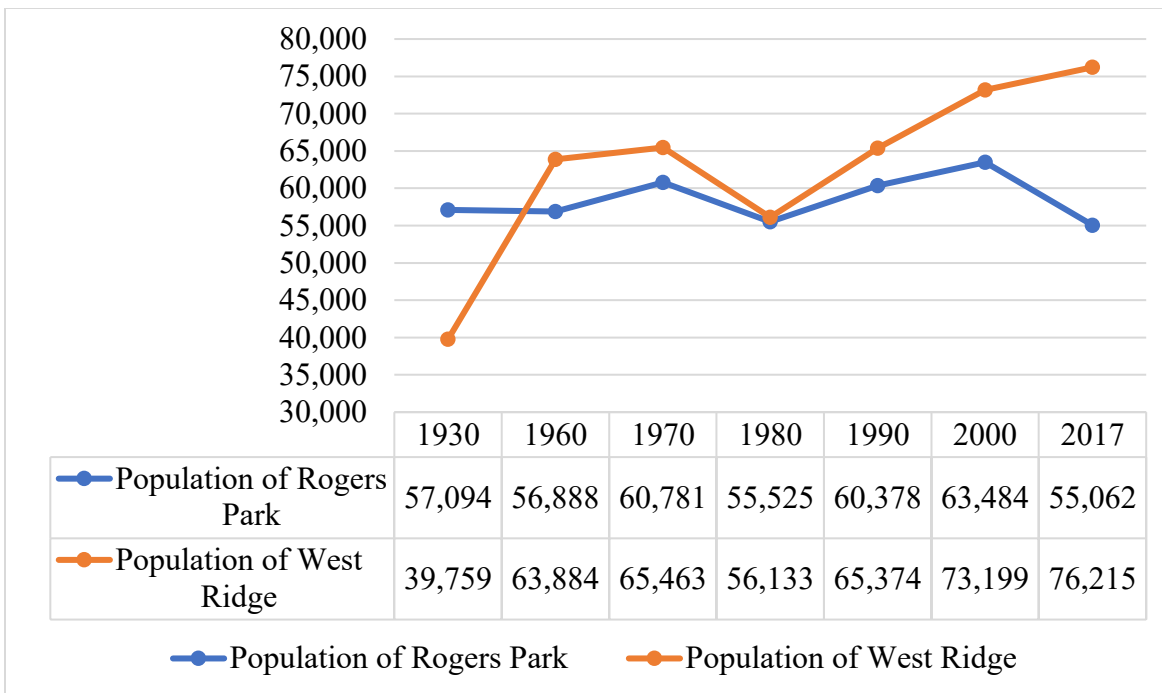


Table 8. Populations of Rogers Park and West Ridge, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

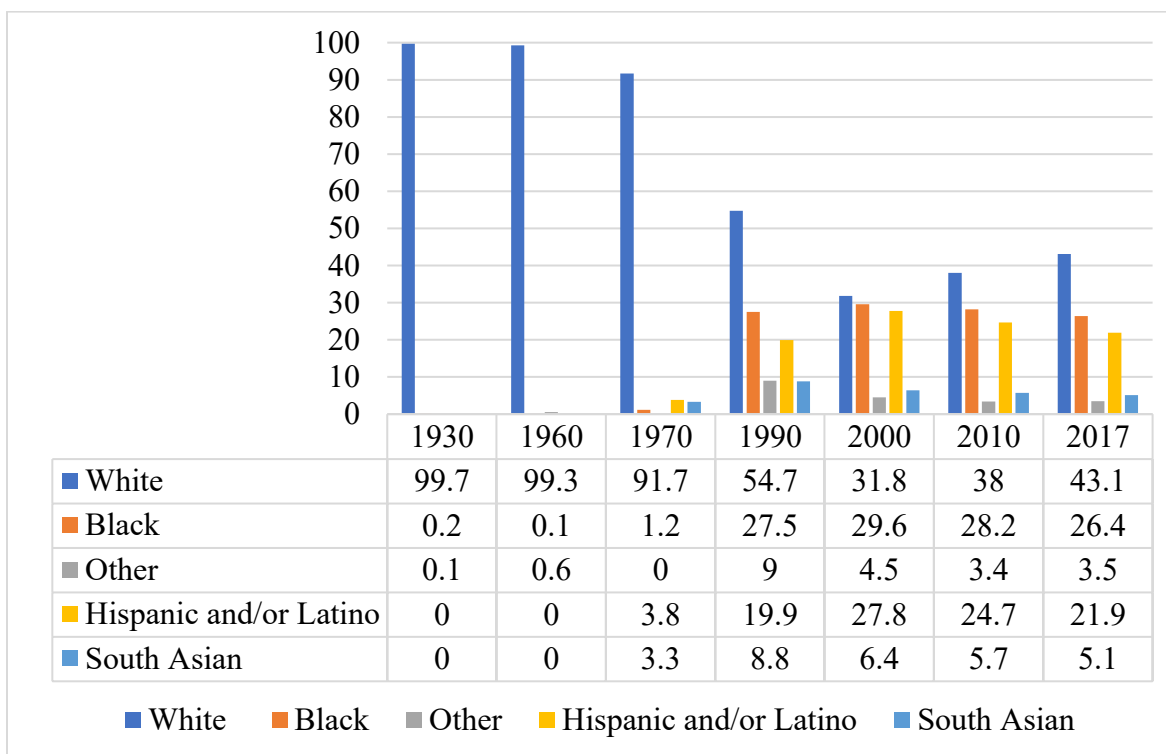


Table 9. Demographic Change by Percentage in Rogers Park, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.¹⁸

¹⁸ The values for Rogers Park in 1970 were drawn from Welter, who did not include a value for “other.”

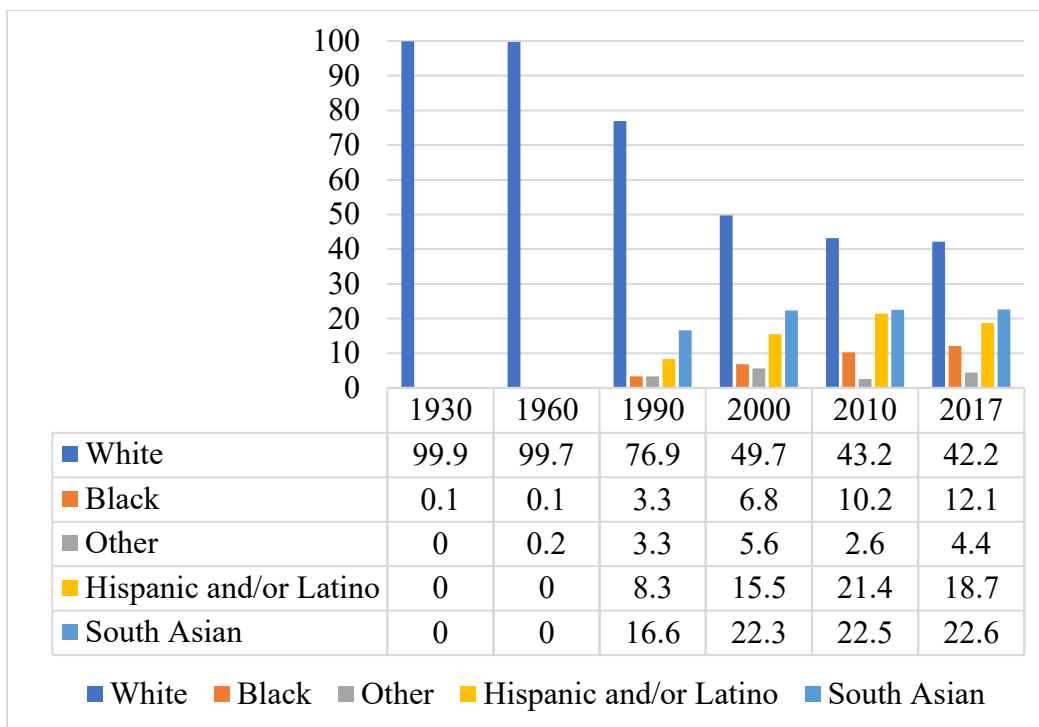


Table 10. Demographic Change by Percentage in West Ridge, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

In addition to demographic change, Rogers Park and West Ridge residents, and particularly those involved with the Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC) and North Town Community Council (NTCC), had been grappling with how to deal with neglected and abandoned residential buildings, a lack of recreational space, and other issues related to neighborhood vitality and economic health since the 1950s and 1960s. They worried that lack of attention to these issues would make the area less attractive to the middle-class residents they associated with economic stability, open the door to in-migration from people from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and encourage white flight to the suburbs. For residents involved in these conversations, demographic change and concerns about urban decay went hand in hand. Black and Hispanic people, and later South Asian immigrants, began moving to Rogers Park and West Ridge in the 1960s, but many of the newcomers were not the middle-class residents hoped for by long-time Rogers Park residents. They tended to be poorer, attracted to the area for its

comparatively affordable housing. The new Rogers Park Historical Society emerged toward the beginning of this demographic shift, a new voice for the area's white ethnic residents and their descendants.¹⁹

Hyde Park residents also dealt with significant demographic change in the decades following World War II. Hyde Park Historical Society founders established their organization at the tail end of an almost thirty-year period of dramatic population fluctuations and urban renewal in Hyde Park. Unlike the Rogers Park and North Town Community Councils, whose members in the 1950s and 1960s wanted to reduce density in decaying areas to retain residents and maintain population stability, Hyde Park residents wanted to reduce residential density in order to significantly lower the number of people living in their neighborhood. In 1971, just a few years before the HPHS opened, about 34,000 people lived in Hyde Park, a 38% decrease from 55,206 in 1950 (see table 11). The number of people living in Hyde Park increased steadily throughout the first half of the twentieth century, caused in part by a large influx of Jewish people and, by the 1930s and 1940s, black Chicagoans moving to Hyde Park from adjacent Black Belt communities. Black in-migration accelerated after the United States Supreme Court "outlaw[ed] the use of racially restrictive covenants in real estate" in 1948, which many white Hyde Park

¹⁹ For more on urban decay in Rogers Park, see Welter; Lily Venson, "Wigoda seeks study to combat blight," *Rogers Park-Edgewater News*, November 8, 1967, Northside Neighborhood History Collection (NNHC), Sulzer Branch of the Chicago Public Library; Gail Stockholm, "Rogers Pk: Community Seeking Stability," *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1967, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, July 2019; and Michael Daly and Michael Leachman, "Ch. 7: Rogers Park, Edgewater, Uptown, and Chicago Lawn, Chicago," *Cityscape* 4 (2) 1998, 134-139. Concerns about decay, conservation, and urban renewal in Chicago were not unique to Rogers Park and West Ridge. For other examples from Chicago's north side, see Daly and Leachman, Devin Velosco Hunter, "Growing diversity: Urban renewal, community activism, and the politics of cultural diversity in Uptown Chicago, 1940-1970," (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2015), and Larry Bennett, *Neighborhood Politics: Chicago and Sheffield* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997). For more on the Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC) see chapter 2. West Rogers Park residents formed the North Town Community Council (NTCC) in 1963 to, like the RPCC, advocate for local building conservation. See "North Town Council Seeks Problems to Form Goals," *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1963, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, July 2019; Pacyga and Skerrett, 13; and Sam Smith, "Rogers Park fighting blight by pushing landlord reforms," *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1979, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, July 2019.

residents and University of Chicago administrators had used as a “bulwark against [black] encroachment” from the Black Belt into Hyde Park. By 1960, and likely the late 1950s, white residents no longer held a significant majority in Hyde Park (see table 12).²⁰

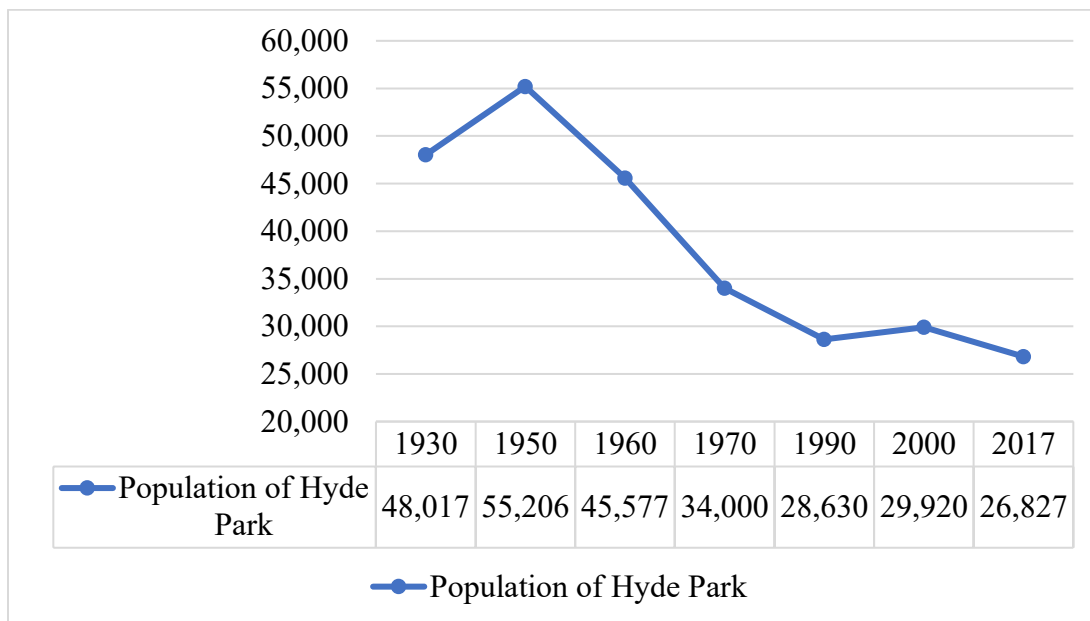


Table 11. Population of Hyde Park, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

²⁰ The term “Black Belt...was commonly used to identify the predominately African American community on Chicago's South Side.” See Wallace Best, “Black Belt,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/140.html>. White Chicagoans used racial covenants, violence, and threats of violence to confine black Chicagoans to Black Belt neighborhoods. For more on the use of restrictive covenants and forced ghettoization in Chicago, see: Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture and Community in Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2006); James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Natalie Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), and Thomas Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Jack Houston and Fredric Soll, “Hyde Park Lament: ‘Can’t See Raising Rents Again’,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 1971; and Gladys Priddy, “Fact Finding Book Gives Detailed Hyde Park Report,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1954, both accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, November 2019; Susan O’Connor Davis, *Chicago’s Historic Hyde Park* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 341; and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, “Community Data Snapshot” for Hyde Park, June 2019, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/Hyde+Park.pdf>; Max Grinnell, “Hyde Park,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/622.html>, Christopher Manning, “African Americans,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/27.html>; and Wallace Best, all accessed July 2019.

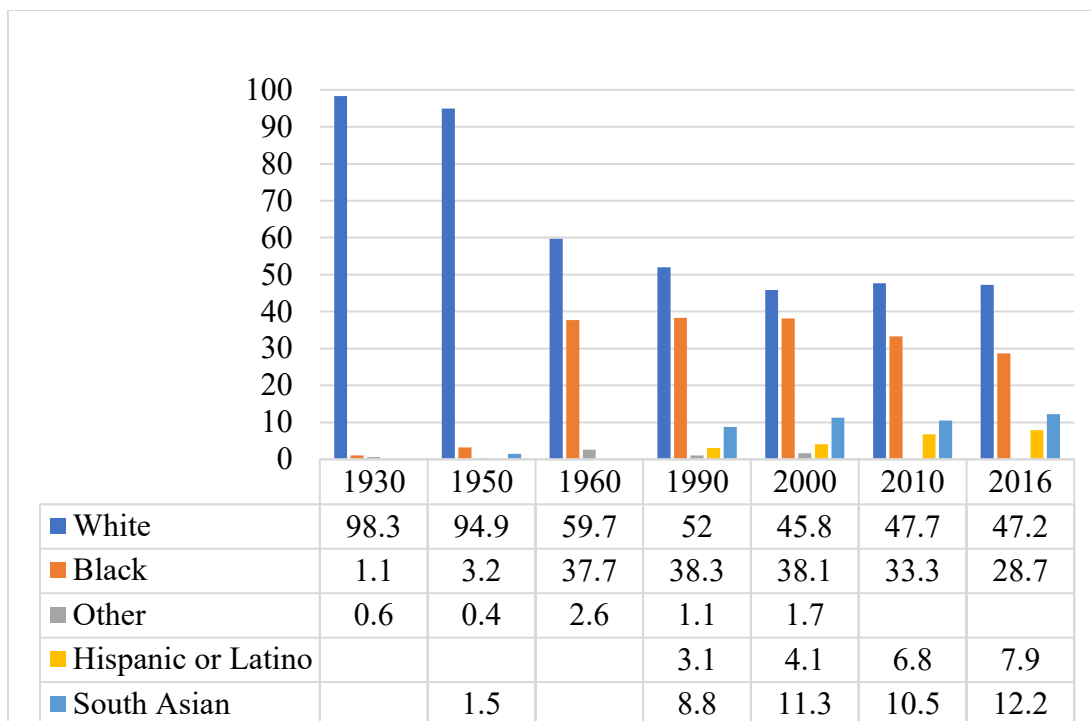


Table 12. Demographic Change by Percentage in Hyde Park, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.²¹

New residents were drawn to Hyde Park’s relatively inexpensive housing, which was often supplied by landlords who illegally subdivided existing residences to mitigate postwar housing shortages. Established Hyde Park residents believed this overcrowding led to a host of issues that constituted “major threats to the community,” including “increased congestion, a rising crime rate, and a proliferation of bars.” Reflecting back on that time in her 1964 memoir about urban renewal in Hyde Park, Muriel Beadle described the scene, “Taverns with late night hours established themselves in location after location as lower wage earners took the place of the middle class, moving into subdivided and declining structures as they escaped the expanding ghetto.” These “lower wage earners,” Beadle noted, contributed to “a downward shift in income and purchasing power” in Hyde Park. At the same time, new roadways facilitated better access to Chicago’s suburban communities and many white Hyde Parkers decided, along with hundreds of

²¹ Blank values indicate a lack of data.

thousands of other Chicago residents, to take this opportunity to move out of the city. Ultimately, “between 1950 and 1956,” 23,000 “non-whites moved in” to Hyde Park as “20,000 whites left the area.” Black and white residents remaining in Hyde Park feared their neighborhood would continue to welcome poor, and usually black, Chicagoans if they did nothing to intervene.²²

Hyde Park residents decided to form the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference (HPKCC) in late 1949 to address population increases, black in-migration, crime, and building deterioration in Hyde Park. The HPKCC formed in the wake of a decision by “concerned white and African-American citizens...to discuss these pressing issues.” Among those involved were “local faith-based organizations, various human relations commissions, business leaders, and University of Chicago faculty members and students.” HPKCC founders, who included Hyde Park Alderman Leon Despres, decided “the community, if it was to survive, should be integrated racially and planned socially.” To achieve their goal, they set out “to build and maintain a stable interracial community of high standards.” The HPKCC believed residents of Hyde Park and Kenwood should play a hands-on role in any efforts to stabilize their neighborhood as well as in any plans for urban renewal. The University of Chicago, a major force in Hyde Park affairs, took a slightly different path. Though some University of Chicago faculty and staff participated in HPKCC efforts as private residents, the University of Chicago administration supported a new group, the South East Chicago Commission (SECC), formed “in 1952 to deal with the threat of real estate exploitation and racial transition in the surrounding communities.” The HPKCC worked through a network of hyper-local “block clubs and neighborhood watches” to build interracial community and dialogue among residents, while the SECC decided to “build a set of

²² Valetta Press, *A Case Study of Urban Renewal* (Chicago: The Center for Policy Study at the University of Chicago, 1971), 7-8; Muriel Beadle, *The Hyde Park-Kenwood Urban Renewal Years: A History to Date* (Chicago, 1964) as quoted in Davis, 295, 297.

buffers around [the University of Chicago] campus rather than smooth the process of neighborhood transition.” Both groups would play significant (and sometimes contradictory) roles planning Hyde Park’s future.²³

Over the next two decades the University of Chicago and the SECC planned and oversaw much of the physical redevelopment that would occur as part of urban renewal in Hyde Park. In addition to redeveloping two large business districts north of campus, the SECC constructed new buildings on the campus’ southern border in a thinly veiled attempt to create a physical barrier between campus and the predominantly black community of Woodlawn to the immediate south. The SECC also took over and purchased properties in densely settled areas near campus, evicted the (usually black, low-income) residents, and built lower density campus housing for University of Chicago students. This effectively reduced the number of black people living close to campus and created additional barriers between the university and neighboring Black Belt communities. Meanwhile, the HPKCC “provided the means for neighbors to interact, discuss common interests and concerns, and cooperatively solve problems at a grassroots level.” HPKCC members “were actively engaging with city-wide urban renewal planning” but also took on a broader range of programs meant to “find concrete solutions for physical problems in the neighborhoods, while...fostering effective interracial communication and changing attitudes.” Like the Rogers Park and North Town Community Councils, formed by residents to tackle local problems related

²³ Dr. Sol Tax, an anthropologist at the University of Chicago, explained the relationship between the HPKCC, SECC, and University of Chicago in his “Residential Integration: The Case of Hyde Park in Chicago,” *Human Organization* 18, No. 1 (1959), 22-27, accessed via JStor. Press, 8; “Guide to the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference Records 1895-2011”; and LaDale Winling, “Students and the Second Ghetto: Federal Legislation, Urban Politics, and Campus Planning at the University of Chicago,” *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 1 (2011): 59-86, 63.

to building conservation, blight, and economic instability, HPKCC members took a direct, hyper-local approach to problem-solving.²⁴

By 1965, most of Hyde Park's major urban renewal initiatives were completed. This did not mean, however, that community conversations about development, housing, and density in Hyde Park ended. The HPKCC continued to investigate solutions to new and ongoing local problems and helped Hyde Park earn a citywide reputation for local activism. By the mid-1970s, local concerns related to the built environment had turned toward the preservation of Hyde Park and Kenwood's remaining historic buildings and districts. Additionally, now that most of the highly visible and disruptive physical work of urban renewal had passed, its history and legacy were up for debate. Many Hyde Park residents involved in the HPKCC, including founding HPHS members Muriel Beadle and Leon Despres, believed urban renewal prevented Hyde Park from turning into a slum. In 1971, Despres said urban renewal had been "fantastically successful" and was the reason "blight has been substantially eliminated" in Hyde Park. He continued, "There have been drawbacks and disappointments, but without urban renewal Hyde Park would simply be part of the black housing ghetto." Though it provoked difficult conversations and decisions, they argued, urban renewal was ultimately responsible for the elimination of decay and blight, reduced population density and overcrowding, and racial integration and economic stabilization across Hyde Park.²⁵

²⁴ Conservation refers to a deliberate effort by local leaders to protect their neighborhoods from urban decay and renewal by improving and maintaining local buildings. See Preston H. Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) for more on conservation in Chicago. For more on the role the University of Chicago played in urban renewal in Hyde Park, see Winling; John Hall Fish, *Black Power/White Control: The Struggle of the Woodlawn Organization in Chicago* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), and Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

²⁵ Muriel Beadle was instrumental in the development of Harper Court, a shopping area for artists and craftspeople displaced by urban renewal clearance elsewhere in Hyde Park, between 1963 and 1965. See Muriel Beadle, *Where*

Not everyone agreed with this assessment. Many black Hyde Parkers, some of whom volunteered with the HPKCC, voiced objections to elements of the urban renewal plan throughout the process. One resident, writing to the *Chicago Defender* in 1957, worried about urban renewal raising area rents, making Hyde Park less accessible to its lower-income and “minority” residents. James Cunningham, HPKCC Executive Director, tried to assuage these concerns, writing in a 1958 *Chicago Defender* editorial, “New housing...will bring mixed occupancy to what has been a white area” (“western and northern” Hyde Park), and “good race relations built up in the neighborhood during the past 10 years should ensure against flight and bring interracial living to the southern end [of Hyde Park].” He also offered assurances about the University of Chicago’s involvement in urban renewal. “Because its business office has a history of having supported restrictive covenants, the University has long been suspect in the eyes of many,” Cunningham wrote. But, he continued, university administration had since concluded that the “University must be surrounded by a physically attractive neighborhood” with “occupancy...either... interracial or all Negro...” Two days later, the *Defender* published an editorial response—likely a rebuttal to Cunningham—in which the author wrote, “The promoters of the [Urban Renewal] Plan may give pious assurances that there will be no racial discrimination. But the fact is indubitable that they are creating an oasis for the privileged few under the panoply of Urban Renewal.... Rentals [will be] high enough to be beyond the income range of the average Negro family.” Journalist Homer Smith reported on “recent [urban renewal] surveys” and reports for the *Chicago Defender* in 1963, writing, “It would seem... Hyde Park, which formerly was undergoing racial transition is becoming cleaved by an economic line of

Has All The Ivy Gone: A Memoir of University Life (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1972) and “Hyde Park Urban Renewal Timeline,” <http://hydepark.org/historicpres/urbanrentimeline.htm> and <http://hydepark.org/historicpres/urbanrtimeline2.htm>, accessed May 2019; Press, 43-44.

demarcation through which Negroes can pass—if they can pay.” His summary supported claims by many black Chicagoans that urban renewal reinforced and exacerbated racial discrimination in Hyde Park.²⁶

Hyde Park Historical Society founders established their historical society within the next decade to explore urban renewal’s next phase in Hyde Park. Physical renewal had ended, but residents were left to grapple with how best to preserve Hyde Park and Kenwood’s remaining historic structures, how to remember urban renewal’s history and impact, and how to prevent decay and physical renewal from returning to Hyde Park in the future. Rogers Park Historical Society founders shared similar concerns. Urban renewal never came to either Rogers Park or West Ridge, but residents feared the possibility of such a future if they allowed neglect and decay to spread across their neighborhood. Working through historical societies provided historical society founders with a new kind of platform, and they used it to encourage people to maintain their physical surroundings, erect heritage barriers to control outsider access to their communities, and negotiate their own identities and privileges in communities that looked very different than they did ten and twenty years before.

²⁶ Black Hyde Park residents shared concerns about urban renewal with black Americans across the United States. In *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), Andrew Hurley explains, “Between 1949 and 1967...more than 600,000 residents were displaced from their homes. African Americans constituted 80 percent of these refugees, a statistic that led many critics of the federal program to label urban renewal ‘Negro Removal’” (10). In *Making the Second Ghetto*, historian Arnold Hirsch’s pivotal 1983 work about ghettoization on Chicago’s south side, Hirsch argued that HPKCC and SECC efforts to create an “interracial community of high standards” failed because urban renewal and redevelopment made Hyde Park largely inaccessible to lower-income black families. “Area Renewal Plan Hit By Hyde Park Resident,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 6, 1957; James V. Cunningham, “Will Negroes Get Fair Deal in Hyde Park,” *Chicago Defender*, March 8, 1958; “Hyde Park Housing Scheme,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, March 10, 1958; and Homer Smith, “Chicago’s Black Belt Expands, But Never Cracks,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 20, 1963, all accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, November 2019.

**“An Island Surrounded by the Wasteland of the South Side...:” Historic Preservation and
“Love of Place” in Hyde Park²⁷**

HPHS founders jumped into their first project soon after their first official meeting. They decided to purchase the historic Hyde Park cable car building Clyde Watkins “had been fond of for so many years” and renovate it for use as the HPHS headquarters. They closed the sale by spring 1978 and asked Chicago architect John Vinci to manage the restoration. Vinci, who won an American Institute of Architects (AIA) Chicago Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 for the “integral part” he played “in the preservation and restoration” of some of Chicago’s most famed historic buildings, agreed to work with the HPHS and began working on the headquarters project later that summer. In April 1979, with the restoration well underway, Devereux Bowly shared a building report— “the State of the Station”—with HPHS members in the second issue of the society’s newsletter. They planned, he wrote, to “create an authentic railroad station appearance as of the late 19th century” and locate the HPHS office in “what was once the station master’s office.” They would arrange “the rest of the space... as a station waiting room” with “movable wooden benches... supplemented for meetings by folding chairs, a wood-burning stove, ticket window openings, a sales stand, and facilities for display of historical material.” They hoped to immerse visitors in an environment reminiscent of nineteenth century Hyde Park.²⁸

²⁷ A quote from David Hamer, *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), 16, the entirety of which reads: “Hyde Park-Kenwood in Chicago...for instance, became an island surrounded by the wasteland of the South Side that resulted from urban renewal.”

²⁸ Fries; HPHS newsletter Vol. 1, No. 2, April 1979; HPHS board meeting minutes from November 22, 1976, March 14, 1977, May 8, 1978, and September 13, 1978; and grant proposal from the HPHS to the Joyce Foundation, undated but context suggests early 1979, all from HPHS collection; and “Welcome to the Hyde Park Historical Society,” <http://www.hydeparkhistory.org/about-us-3/> and “John Vinci, FAIA, To Be Awarded AIA Chicago’s 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award,” AIA Chicago, <https://www.aiachicago.org/news/entry/john-vinci-award/#.XevaVehKg2w>, both accessed May 2019.



Figure 5: Hyde Park Historical Society headquarters, 5529 South Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL. December 2019. Source: Author's Collection.

The cable car building opened to the public on October 26, 1980. Bowly, Watkins, who was HPHS president at that time, and other board members organized a celebration in honor of the occasion. Bowly recalled, “There was a big opening where there was a parade...and the police horses led the parade and the workers were invited to attend, in addition to the community.” Following them in the parade were representatives from several local organizations, including “the Chicago Children’s Choir, the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Blue Gargoyle, the Kenwood Academy band, the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, St. Thomas the Apostle School, Kiwanis Club, Lions Club, E.F. Clow Company, Gilbert and Sullivan Company, mimes, clowns, Hyde Parkers in historical costumes, also on floats and decorated bikes and in antique cars.” A ribbon-cutting ceremony, performed by Watkins, followed the parade and everyone in attendance was invited to visit the HPHS’ first exhibition in its new headquarters: “Hyde Park Politics: 1860-1919.” After

two years of planning and restoration, the HPHS achieved its first major goal to secure a building and establish a permanent physical residence in Hyde Park.²⁹

The cable car project helped demonstrate the HPHS board's commitment to local historic preservation, which they continued by supporting efforts to designate historic districts in Hyde Park. The founding cohort decided at their earliest meetings in 1975 to form a society that could, among other things, "work with the city of Chicago Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks in designating landmark buildings and districts in the area"—work they began in earnest in late 1977 and 1978 when they helped lead public discussions about the "proposed designation of portions of the Hyde Park-Kenwood communities as national, state, and local historic districts." In late 1977, Robert Wagner, acting on behalf of the Department of Conservation of the State of Illinois, nominated Hyde Park-Kenwood to the National Register of Historic Places. At about the same time, Michael Conzen and Devereux Bowly helped nominate parts of Hyde Park and Kenwood for historic district designation at the state and local levels, respectively. Conzen, Professor of Geography at the University of Chicago and HPHS board member, joined the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Committee on January 1, 1978, and Devereux Bowly, also a HPHS board member, was then a member of the Advisory Committee to the Chicago Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks. In addition to Conzen and Bowly's involvement with the district nominations, the HPHS board decided in late 1977 to "provide leadership in educating community residents as to the status of these [historic district] proposals and their impact on the community..." As a result, the HPHS hosted a public forum,

²⁹ Bowly interview transcript; and "Hyde Park Historical Society to Open Restored Cable Car Station" press release, 1980, HPHS collection.

moderated by Muriel Beadle, in March 1978 to facilitate discussion about the proposed district designations among the “over 200 local residents” in attendance.³⁰

HPHS founders supported the cable car project and historic district nominations because historic preservation drew consistent public attention to the built environment. Despres in particular emphasized the need for vigilance, saying at the May 1976 meeting, “in the study of Hyde Park’s history, we learn that our difficulties [with decay] accumulated during periods of non-planning...it is therefore dangerous to relax about planning, because the periods of such relaxation were the periods when decay silently crept up on Hyde Park.” Historic districts would help by shining a spotlight on Hyde Park’s built environment. “It was...pointed out” at the HPHS’ March 1978 community forum, for example, “that the increased awareness and pride which developed from designated homes and neighborhoods seemed to generate better city services for that area.” And, Wagner noted, if Hyde Park-Kenwood joined the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district, people who owned property within the district would be able to apply for “funds...for restoration projects” to help keep their properties in good condition. By shining a spotlight on local buildings, preservation advocates hoped to prevent physical neglect and decay from returning to Hyde Park.³¹

Historic preservation also provided HPHS members with a way to maintain the demographic status quo—the HPKCC’s “interracial community of high standards”—as it existed

³⁰ HPHS board meeting minutes from December 11, 1977, September 13, 1978, and October 17, 1978; undated letter, likely dating to late 1975, inviting people to attend a January 13, 1976 meeting about the possibility of founding a Hyde Park Historical Society; Sharon Glick, “Ask designation as National Historic District,” *Hyde Park Herald*, February 22, 1978; and “Hyde Park Historical Society hears landmark proposal,” *Hyde Park Herald*, March 22, 1978, all from HPHS collection; and Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District Nomination for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, State of Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, <http://gis.hpa.state.il.us/PDFs/200151.pdf>, accessed July 2019.

³¹ Despres, “What’s Past is Prologue”; “Hyde Park Historical Society hears landmark proposal”; and Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District nomination.

after the completion of Hyde Park's urban renewal projects. HPHS leadership almost certainly knew about the positive correlation between historic preservation and property values and that any successful historic preservation efforts would likely increase the cost of living in Hyde Park, making it less accessible to lower-income Chicagoans. According to historian Andrew Hurley, historic preservationists had moved away from the idea that historic buildings should "stand apart from their host societies" by the mid-1970s. They instead began to embrace the concept of "adaptive reuse," which advocated for the "repair and repurpos[ing] of...original building[s]" and their reintegration into their surrounding communities. "Adaptive reuse," Hurley explained, "aligned preservation with economic development because it allowed...rehabilitation for profit-making ventures." People lived, worked, and played in restored buildings, which, "for cities...offered a way to attract new investment, stimulate job creation, and increase tax revenue." Consequently, "once these neighborhoods began to look like solid investments, they attracted a...range of buyers," boosting housing demand, property costs, and rents, and outpricing lower-income residents. Hyde Park was no exception, and rising rents caused by urban renewal and preservation-related investment strengthened the "economic line of demarcation" separating Hyde Park from its poorer neighbors.³²

HPHS founders also used "love of place" histories to maintain the residential status quo and support the "line of demarcation" separating Hyde Park from surrounding communities. Kathleen Neils Conzen, early HPHS board member and (now emeritus) Professor of History of the University of Chicago, reflected that Hyde Park residents worked to "preserve the physical character as it came out of urban renewal, but also the social character." And "to preserve the

³² Hurley, 12-13. The "economic line of demarcation" quote comes from Homer Smith's "Chicago's Black Belt Expands, But Never Cracks" article for the *Chicago Defender*.

social character,” they tried to make Hyde Park a place where people wanted to live long-term—a place they felt responsible for, and where they could raise children. HPHS founders used “love of place” histories in service to local boosterism by sharing local histories in their programs, newsletters, and exhibits “emphasi[zing] the marking of eras of significant events and achievements.” They celebrated things like Hyde Park’s connection to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, Frank Lloyd Wright and the “Prairie School [of] architecture,” and the many “great [Hyde Park] citizens” who helped build Chicago, like the owner of Hyde Park’s Rosenwald House who was a “gifted businessman and enlightened reformer and philanthropist.” “Love of place” histories provided an opportunity for HPHS founders to “hark back to an era when their town was prosperous” and explicate the connections between Hyde Park residents and some of Chicago’s most renowned institutions.³³

In addition to “keep[ing] people there,” maintaining “the interracial community of high standards” also meant limiting outsider access to Hyde Park. HPHS founders used local history to manage access by determining who held the strongest claim to Hyde Park and vowing to protect their legacy. They especially valued longevity and tenure in Hyde Park, presenting, for example, prizes to the “longest resident of Hyde Park-Kenwood” and to people in possession of the “oldest photograph” and “oldest letter” at the May 1976 meeting. Similarly, the board invited “descendents [sic] of early Hyde Park families” to a meeting on October 29, 1978 with Paul Cornell, the “grandson and namesake of the founder of Hyde Park,” so they could be “honored” publicly for their ancestors’ contributions to the development of Hyde Park. Their histories

³³ Hamer notes the connection between positive, uncritical local histories and local boosterism in *History in Urban Places*, 37, as does Carol Kammen in her August 2017 interview with Hope Shannon for *History News* Vol. 73 No. 1 (Winter 2018); Press release about cable car opening to public, October 26, 1980; and *HPHS Newsletter* Vol. 1 No. 2, April 1979, both from HPHS collections; and Kathleen Conzen, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, May 6, 2019.

tended to focus on and celebrate the period before mid-century demographic change, racial tension, and urban renewal—Hyde Park’s “golden age,” when it was a predominantly white “island” surrounded by Chicago’s Black Belt. Though home to an interracial middle-class population by the mid-1970s, local histories claimed Hyde Park had white roots and a white future, setting Hyde Park apart from the majority of its South Side neighbors.³⁴

Using local history to establish who did and did not have a rightful claim to Hyde Park helped HPHS founders create a positive legacy for urban renewal. By normalizing whiteness in Hyde Park’s past, HPHS founders helped turn HPKCC and SECC efforts to create a “stable interracial community” into a story about white generosity instead of “negro removal,” and urban renewal advocates into neighborhood saviors. Despres explained at the May 1976 public meeting how the existing community rallied to save Hyde Park in 1949: “Hyde Park has grown in strength from 1905 to 1949 and that was in the quality of its residents. As the community established its standards of civic and intellectual values...it even more strongly attracted like-minded people to join it and live in the area. Thus, when a crisis came in 1949, the community itself was ready to resolve it by a bold and inspired planning effort.” This community, the story continued, formed “the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference...on the startling basis that the well-being of Hyde Park could be served only by affirmatively urging and inviting Black residents to live in Hyde Park...” They made a progressive decision to integrate Hyde Park, Despres explained, at a time when few stable integrated communities existed in the United States—a decision they used to justify their efforts to limit white flight out of Hyde Park instead

³⁴ For more on how and why preservationists create and use “golden ages” in urban contexts, see Hurley, 24-25. Brochure advertising first public meeting of the HPHS on May 12, 1976, HPHS event flyer for Paul Cornell program on October 29, 1978, “Historical Society presents first Paul Cornell Awards,” *Hyde Park Herald*, February 7, 1979; and “Plenty of HP Enthusiasm,” all from HPHS collection; and Kathleen Conzen interview.

of accommodating lower-income residents searching for a place to live. In the end, he argued, the “community itself” was “the hero” that led Hyde Park’s mid-century crusade to create a “heterogeneous, interracial, concerned community” and Hyde Park’s successful urban renewal efforts set it apart from the many other neighborhoods and cities dealing with the same thing. Neighborhoods across the United States, including those in Chicago, had yet to “come to terms with this great American problem” and “eliminate the barriers of color prejudice,” but Hyde Park overcame the odds, Despres explained, by using urban renewal to achieve a level of racial unity that few others had managed to replicate.³⁵

Diversity, Identity, and Local History in Rogers Park and West Ridge

While HPHS founders worked to maintain Hyde Park’s demographic status quo, Rogers Park and West Ridge residents founded the new Rogers Park Historical Society in 1975 to negotiate their own complicated relationship with local diversity. Rogers Park and West Ridge also experienced significant demographic change, though it came to Chicago’s far north side much later than Hyde Park and fueled concerns about decay well into the late twentieth century. RPHS founders used local history to navigate these changes. Like their counterparts in Hyde Park, RPHS founders used “love of place” histories to build a network of people who supported their projects, which included exploring white ethnic privilege and identity in neighborhoods where the white ethnic presence dwindled more with each passing year. They identified a “golden age” defined by white ethnic achievement to challenge the idea that growing local diversity was a contemporary phenomenon, arguing instead that diversity began with white ethnic settlement much earlier in the local past. By including white ethnics in definitions of local

³⁵ Despres, “What’s Past is Prologue.”

diversity, RPHS members helped whiten diversity's image and stake a claim for white ethnics in their two neighborhoods, as well as mask tension related to racial and ethnic demographic change and assure residents that Rogers Park and West Ridge were safe and healthy places in which to live and work.

During the RPHS' first decade, Mary Jo Doyle and other RPHS board members organized programs about local history, collected artifacts, papers, and other memorabilia related to Rogers Park's history, and considered how they might increase the RPHS' local impact. They brought long-time residents in to speak at their meetings from the very beginning, hoping to hear, and sometimes record, their stories while they still had the opportunity. Their meetings, programs, and collecting efforts occupied most of their efforts until 1985, when RPHS board members and volunteers began organizing a yearly house tour, and 1986, when they published the first *RPHS Newsletter*. These two endeavors marked the beginning of what would be an eventful ten years for the RPHS, during which time the board spearheaded efforts to celebrate the 1993 centennial of Rogers Park and West Ridge's annexation to the city of Chicago, obtained a permanent physical space and opened their Museum and Educational Resource Center to the public, and participated in the Chicago Historical Society's "Neighborhoods: Keepers of Culture" Project.³⁶

The RPHS' first House Walk took place in Rogers Park in September 1985, at which time the RPHS joined a large cohort of historical societies and heritage organizations offering annual house walks. House walks were (and still are) usually self-guided tours of local homes of historical or architectural significance meant to raise money for the institutions responsible for

³⁶ "Mission and History," RP/WRHS, <https://rpwrhs.org/history/>, accessed June 2019; and Rousseau.

their planning. The Beverly Area Planning Association (BAPA) claimed the “oldest continuous home tour in the Chicago area,” saying in 1988 that their annual house walk was then in its 18th year, and house walks were so popular by the early 1980s that the *Chicago Tribune* began publishing an “annual guide to [Chicago area] home tours” in 1983. The RPHS board decided to join this tradition in 1985 by opening “various historically significant homes in our area” to the public. The first RPHS House Walk was successful enough that the board decided to make it an annual event.³⁷

House walk planners used house walks to instill appreciation for an earlier white ethnic “golden age” among tour attendees. Doyle referred to this concept often when talking about the society’s work, saying for example, “All you have to do [as a member of the RPHS] is believe in Rogers Park, talk about its good points and try to arouse an interest in its past, participate in the present and care about the future.” RPHS house walk planners generally chose homes with historical or architectural significance, or noted for their exceptional beauty, interior design, or unique character. In 1994, for example, the planning committee promised “evidence of past splendors—marble, quartersawn oak, lincrusta panels and hammered ironwork” as well as “a semi-rural nineteenth century Victorian home in all its multicolored glory, [and] an elegant turn-of-the-century mini-mansion...” Similarly, when inviting people to attend the RPHS’ tenth annual house walk, planners presented “dwellings...built during the golden age of Rogers Park and West Ridge before the Great Depression changed the socio-economic structure of our community.” They continued, “The quality of construction and lovely ornamental detailing belie

³⁷ Maureen Hart, “It’s open season on open houses,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 8, 1988 and “They’re heee-e-re: It’s our annual guide to home tours—but first, some major housecleaning,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1989, both accessed via ProQuest, July 2019; and *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 1 No. 1 spring 1986, RP/WRHS collections. The RP/WRHS still organizes annual house walks today.

the fact that many of these homes were built for the middle class of their day. Stained glass, stenciled friezes, beamed ceilings...were commonplace during this era,” as were many “other amenities now associated with only the wealthy.” House walk planners hoped people would leave the tour with a “love of place” rooted in an appreciation for Rogers Park and West Ridge’s imagined golden age.³⁸

In the early 1990s, by which time the annual house walk was an established tradition, the RPHS board turned its attention to the approaching April 1993 centennial of Rogers Park and West Ridge’s annexation to the city of Chicago. They hoped the centennial celebrations, like the house walk, would instill in residents a true “love of place,” but they also used this opportunity to explore Rogers Park and West Ridge’s emerging identity as two of Chicago’s most diverse neighborhoods. Centennial planning began on Wednesday, May 29, 1991, when the RPHS sponsored an open community meeting to gauge local interest in celebrating the centennial. Mary Jo Doyle and Hank Rubin, a West Ridge resident who had just lost his bid for alderman of the fiftieth ward, offered to co-chair the centennial planning committee. The committee wanted to involve as many local “community organizations [as possible], including block clubs, businesses, civic, libraries, parks, political, religious, school, veterans’ groups, etc.,” though RPHS members, and Doyle in particular, ultimately led the planning effort. The committee, eventually renamed the Rogers Park/West Ridge Centennial Commission, decided to organize a series of programs

³⁸ *RP/WRHS Newsletter*, Vol. 8 No. 3, late summer 1993; *RP/WRHS Newsletter*, Vol. 9 No. 3, late summer 1994; *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 2 No. 2, spring 1987; and *RPWRHS Newsletter*, Vol. 10, No. 3, late summer 1995, all from RP/WRHS collections; Kammen interview; and Hart, “It’s open season on open houses.”

and events beginning in April 1992 and continuing through the actual centennial on April 4, 1993 to the end of 1993.³⁹

The planning commission spent the next ten months organizing a year-and-a-half's worth of centennial activities, which they used to continue exploring white ethnic history and identity on Chicago's far north side. The celebration began officially on Sunday, April 5, 1992, when current and former Rogers Park and West Ridge residents "gather[ed] on Ridge Boulevard" to join a "memorable handholding" on and across "this historic route which today is the common border of the sister communities of Rogers Park and West Ridge." The commission followed "Hands Across Ridge" with events like a "Centennial Commission Poster Contest" for local schoolchildren, several "double-decker bus tours" highlighting places of local historical significance, and the "Great Facial Experiment," during which they encouraged local men to "start growing that handlebar moustache, mutton chops or a fancy beard—or maybe all three" and show off their efforts at the "Gay '90s Picnic." Interested residents could also attend the "Centennial Crooners Show" to hear members of several adult choruses sing songs long absent from radio waves, the "Especially Ethnic" festival, or the Oral History Fair panel, at which "panelists...shared memories and tales of life in the 1920s, 30s and 40s...[like] lots of walking...three-cent streetcar fares...leaving home without locking doors...neighbors taking care of one another...[and] prairie grass way over their heads." The centennial commission filled their calendar with events celebrating Rogers Park and West Ridge's white ethnic "golden age."⁴⁰

³⁹ *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 2, spring 1991; and "Groups set centennial celebration," *Lerner News Star*, December 4, 1991, both from RP/WRHS collections.

⁴⁰ *RPHS Historian*, Vol. 7, No. 1, winter 1991-1992; *RPHS Historian*, Vol. 7 No. 3, summer 1992; *RPHS Historian* Vol. 7 No. 4, fall 1992, all from RP/WRHS collections; and "Mission and History," RP/WRHS.

By exploring and celebrating white ethnic history and identity in Rogers Park and West Ridge, RPHS leaders contributed to a broader effort by local neighborhood and civic organizations “to make sense of local racial, class, and social transformations” taking place on Chicago’s far north side. Together, according to sociologist Ellen Berrey, “...they collectively formulated an identity for the neighborhood as an exemplar of social diversity.” In November 1986, for example, “people of all ages and backgrounds,” including RPHS members, came together to perform “‘Tapestry, Our Neighborhood,’ a play...about Rogers Park...depicting the successful racial and international integration of a neighborhood.” Similarly, Alderman Joe Moore and “his chief of staff would cite US census data on Rogers Park as evidence of the neighborhood’s extraordinary diversity” and, “differentiated the neighborhood from the rampant segregation throughout Chicago and its history of racial conflict and from Chicago’s white-dominated, economically homogenous suburbs and social division around the world.”

Considering demographic change through the lens of integration allowed residents to construct a definition of diversity that presented “racial groups, including white people...as essential elements of diversity, equally present...and equally valued.” By the 1990s, stories about this happy co-existence on the far north side began to spread beyond Rogers Park and West Ridge. In 1996, for example, Dionne Searcey wrote, “These days, the Far North Side area known as Rogers Park/West Ridge is one of the most racially, ethnically and religiously mixed communities in the city” in her article for the *Chicago Tribune*. Searcey described one block on which “Korean-Americans own the pharmacy and the cleaners...The gyro shop and the pizzeria are owned by Greek-Americans. And the grocery store in the middle of the block is owned by an

Arabian American.” By the new millennium, Rogers Park and West Ridge had gained a city-wide reputation for being two of Chicago’s most diverse neighborhoods.⁴¹

RPHS leadership supported efforts to celebrate Rogers Park and West Ridge as “exemplar[s] of social diversity,” but used local history to locate diversity’s beginnings in the more distant past. Diversity was not a recent phenomenon, they argued, having originated in the area’s late nineteenth and early twentieth century white ethnic immigrant communities. Jackie McNicol, who had been involved in both efforts to establish historical societies in Rogers Park, explicated this point in a 1992 article for the *RPHS Newsletter* called “Two Stories and a P.S. Showing How Rogers Park ‘Wrote the Book’ on Diversity A Long Time Ago.” McNicol recalled a teacher named Mrs. Corcoran telling her sixth grade class at a local primary school in 1936, “You are fortunate...to be living in a very cosmopolitan area.” Corcoran had “assigned a project” requiring students, including McNicol, “to ask our parents where their families had come from, to draw a map and write a description of that country as it was when family members had left and as it was at our moment.” She continued, “We learned a lot about ourselves...Rogers Park was, indeed, very cosmopolitan.” A few years later, as a student at Sullivan High School, McNicol recalled going “around the room, naming the country our families had once left. Again, it was a ‘world tour.’” The area’s many white ethnic families had long celebrated religious,

⁴¹ See Mary Barr, *Friends Disappear: The Battle for Racial Equality in Evanston* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014) for another Chicago-area example examining a “prevailing discourse of integration” amid “continuing segregation” (13). Joe Moore was Chicago’s forty-ninth ward alderman from 1991 until 2019. Philip Nyden, John Lukehart, Michael T. Maly, and William Peterman evaluate “stable diversity” in Rogers Park, among other communities, in “Chapter 1: Neighborhood Racial and Ethnic Diversity in U.S. Cities,” *Cityscape* 4, no. 2 (1998): 1-17. Ellen Berrey, *The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 132-134, 138; *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 1 No. 3, fall 1986, RP/WRHS collections; and Searcey.

economic, and ethnic diversity, she argued, and, while diversity was certainly worth celebrating, it was not a new phenomenon.⁴²

By claiming ownership over local diversity's origins, as well as staking a claim for white ethnics in Rogers Park and West Ridge, RPHS leadership helped to whiten diversity's image to assure residents that increasing racial and ethnic diversity did not mean decay and decline. In 1989, RPHS member Glenda Hyde wrote, "There have been some drastic changes [and] some of these have come with the decline of businesses and the influx of a mixture of new immigrants," but "Rogers Park has always survived declines, even from its early history, through the vibrancy and enthusiasm of its immigrants. It was the immigrants, who in the early days of the Indians, brought Rogers Park from farmland to a prosperous area" in an article for the *RPHS Newsletter*. She continued, "The community has quite a lot to offer any insecure visitor who is afraid of the 'colored question.' It is one of the most integrated, yet diverse ethnic areas in metropolitan Chicago and the reason for this is that the people realize one thing: that 'partnership in anything is the best solution to a problem.'" Hyde presented an image of two neighborhoods that had managed to avoid the same racial and ethnic troubles plaguing other urban communities and attributed that harmony to Rogers Park and West Ridge's long immigrant history.⁴³

Indeed, there was a general sense by the late 1980s and early 1990s that the economic tide had turned for Rogers Park and West Ridge. Forty-ninth Ward Alderman David Orr told a *Chicago Tribune* journalist in 1988, "We're seeing significant investment interest in just about every corner of the ward" and "we have a lot fewer vacant storefronts than we did seven or eight

⁴² *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 2, spring 1992; and *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 1, winter 1989, both from RP/WRHS collections.

⁴³ *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 2, spring 1992; and *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 1, winter 1989, both from RP/WRHS collections.

years ago.” Glenda Hyde noted continuing efforts by the RPCC in particular to “keep a watchful eye on landlords so that they preserve their buildings, which provide beauty and shelter for the community’s residents.” This “construction and renovation,” according to Hyde, served as a “stage setter for the comeback of this area.” The RPCC acknowledged Mary Jo Doyle’s efforts on behalf of the RPHS in turn, awarding her its “Citizen of the Year” award in 1987 for “her long involvement in civic affairs in Rogers Park and her personal commitment to preserving the rich heritage of the area as a basic foundation in building a solid future for the development of a stronger Rogers Park.”⁴⁴

Attempts by RPHS leaders and local boosters to convey an image of a community united by a commitment to diversity clashed with the very real racial tensions simmering within Rogers Park and West Ridge. During preparations for the centennial celebrations, for example, Patricia Mooney-Melvin, an Associate Professor of History at Loyola University Chicago, recalled facing intense opposition to her proposal for a student project that would consider the histories of both Rogers Park and West Ridge. “At one of the Rogers Park/West Ridge celebration planning meetings,” Mooney-Melvin explained, “a speaker from West Ridge who received a lot of applause made it clear she had *no* interest in being associated with Rogers Park, which she saw as full of crime and not at all like West Ridge.” The reaction to Mooney-Melvin’s proposal did not surprise Dona Vitale, current RP/WRHS treasurer, who said, “I would put money on that being very much a political, probably racially-based reaction. Because at that time [there was an idea that] Rogers Park was ‘a bunch of hippies who were letting all the...poor people and blacks and Hispanics into the neighborhood, and they’re ruining it. And West Ridge is this nice stable,

⁴⁴ *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, spring 1988; and *RPHS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 1, winter 1989, both from RP/WRHS collections.

community of homeowners who are really holding down the fort.” Indeed, Robert Case, a long-time RP/WRHS volunteer recruited by Doyle in the late 1990s, noted a steep drop in West Ridge memberships when the RPHS board moved its headquarters from West Ridge to Rogers Park in 2010. Distance probably ended some memberships, but others likely stopped due to concerns about crime and safety. Case explained, West Ridge residents “won’t come here [to Rogers Park]. I think it’s seen as less safe...this was where white flight occurred.” The RP/WRHS experience with West Ridge residents suggests some West Ridgers resented being compared to and grouped with their neighbors in Rogers Park and instead hoped to maintain a separate and distinct identity for West Ridge.⁴⁵

In 1994, not long after the culmination of centennial celebrations in Rogers Park and West Ridge, the historical society had the opportunity to share its understanding of local diversity with a much broader audience. RPHS leadership—who by then had officially changed the society’s name to the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS)—announced they would be involved in the Chicago Historical Society’s *Neighborhoods: Keepers of Culture* project. According to the RP/WRHS, the Chicago Historical Society (CHS) “hope[d] to document and share the stories of people and places important to [Rogers Park and West Ridge]...history.” From CHS’ perspective, efforts in Rogers Park and West Ridge resulted from a broader change in its institutional mission. CHS leadership had committed to working with “diverse public groups” across Chicago by bringing “community representatives...into the planning process” of various exhibitions to be hosted at CHS, including “a series focused on Chicago neighborhoods.” For the *Neighborhoods* project, an advisory committee including

⁴⁵ Private correspondence, Patricia Mooney-Melvin and Hope Shannon, September 3, 2019; Dona Vitale, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, September 25, 2019; Robert Case, Glenna Eaves, Dona Vitale, and Kenneth Walchak, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, September 9, 2019.

“community activists and...academics” chose “areas that were geographically, ethnically, historically, and economically diverse.” The four locations they selected included Rogers Park and West Ridge, as well as Douglas and Grand Boulevard, Pilsen and Little Village, and the Neart West Side and East Garfield Park, which together “allowed for a more representative offering” of the “city’s population.” Over the next year, RP/WRHS leadership and other community members worked with CHS representatives to plan the Rogers Park and West Ridge part of the *Neighborhoods* project, and *Rogers Park and West Ridge: Rhythms of Diversity* officially opened to the public at the Chicago Historical Society’s museum on December 10, 1995.⁴⁶

Rhythms of Diversity provoked mixed reviews. For one, according to historian Catherine Lewis, who studied the four *Neighborhoods: Keepers of Culture* exhibitions as part of her research about CHS’ late 20th century change in mission, the “project was criticized both inside and outside the institution for avoiding difficult topics.” Part of this stemmed from the fact that “the most active participants [in the planning process] tended to be community elders who had a personal stake in avoiding controversial issues.” In Rogers Park, this meant an avoidance of topics like “gang [violence], drugs, crime, and violence” and a focus on a version of history rooted in boosterism and a desire to instill appreciation for a white ethnic “golden age” among exhibition visitors—the same version of history created and shared by RP/WRHS leadership. In his *Chicago Tribune* article about the exhibition opening, journalist Jay Pridmore wrote about the

⁴⁶ Catherine Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 104; *RP/WRHS Newsletter*, Vol. 9 No. 4, fall 1994; and *RP/WRHS Newsletter*, Vol. 10 No. 3 summer 1995, both from RP/WRHS collections; Thomas J. Jablonsky, Review of “*Neighborhoods: Keepers of the Culture*,” *The Public Historian* 19, no. 4 (1997), 94-97; and Jay Pridmore, “Exhibit Just a Snapshot of Diverse Rogers Park-West Ridge,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 1, 1996, accessed via ProQuest, July 2019.

exhibition's portrayal of local history in a way that would have been very familiar to RP/WRHS members. "Rogers Park," Pridmore wrote, "was named for Philip Rogers, a settler in the 1830s from Ireland via Upstate New York who bought 1,600 acres in the area from the federal government and from Native Americans (just then on their way out of the area)...The area once featured native birch forests, parts of which were preserved in the yards of large Victorian homes...that lined suburb-like streets. There was architecture -- like the old Granada Theater (recently demolished) and the Art Deco buildings of Mundelein College and Loyola University Chicago." Pridmore's *Rhythms of Diversity* review, as well as the exhibition itself, echoed the diversity narrative put forth by the RP/WRHS: diversity includes white ethnics and their descendants and thus the story of diversity in Rogers Park and West Ridge begins with settlement by white ethnic families.⁴⁷

Lewis attributed *Rhythms of Diversity's* failures to the lack of a neighborhood advisory committee truly reflective of the local population. She explained, "The most active organizations [in the exhibition project, like the RP/WRHS] tended to serve white middle-class constituencies." In addition, Lewis argued, "the project was based on the assumption that a neighborhood was a geographic and social space that linked individuals through a shared set of experiences." The project coordinators at CHS assumed the existence of an shared identity rooted in neighborhood—an identity local boosters tried to build but which did not appeal to the recent immigrants, Latino and Hispanic people, and black Chicagoans CHS hoped to recruit to the *Neighborhoods* project. The problem was further exacerbated when "members of the Latino community" expressed "reluctan[ce] to participate because they felt themselves silenced by

⁴⁷ Lewis, 110; Jablonsky; and Pridmore.

vocal members of the group....” CHS’ attempts to foster an inclusive planning process failed, and the project coordinators produced an exhibition that reflected RP/WRHS ideas about local history and diversity, effectively memorializing white ethnic claims to local diversity in the city’s largest local history institution.⁴⁸

Ultimately, the critical reception to *Rhythms of Diversity* reflects the RP/WRHS approach to diversity in Rogers Park and West Ridge. RP/WRHS efforts to include white ethnic people in stories about local diversity ensured white ethnics occupied a central place in a city-wide exhibition committed to exploring racial and ethnic pluralism. They approached diversity at home in the same way, centering the white ethnic experience in ways that obscured the area’s demographic realities and served to boost local confidence in the vitality of their two neighborhoods. Working through a local historical society lent legitimacy and strength to their efforts. Forming a historical society provided residents with a way to claim authority over the history of a distinct geographical area, but this approach meant little to many of Rogers Park and West Ridge’s non-white newcomers. RP/WRHS members used their absence to further justify efforts to focus on white ethnic history and perpetuate the idea that diversity on Chicago’s far north side began with white ethnic immigrants. Hyde Park Historical Society founders and members also used local history to center white experiences in a racially diverse neighborhood. They mobilized “love of place” histories to claim Hyde Park for white heritage—a white “island

⁴⁸ Lewis’ exhibition assessment reflects Meghan A. Burke’s Rogers Park findings in *Racial Ambivalence in Diverse Communities: Whiteness and the Power of Color-blind Ideologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012). Burke explains how white voices, though fewer in number, overwhelmed non-white voices in Rogers Park’s community forums. She quotes a research subject, who said: “In Rogers Park...there is a group of, I would be willing to bet, no more than 200 people that represents 80% of the leadership in the neighborhood...And within that 200 people, I’m going to guess that probably 80% of those folks are white, middle class professionals. And so you’re really missing an entire [group]—200 people representing a neighborhood of 65,000, when two-thirds of the neighborhood is minority...” (92); and Lewis, 106, 107, 110.

surrounded by the...South Side”—and turn urban renewal’s legacy into a positive story about white generosity and interracial cooperation. In both cases, historical society leadership used local history to claim authority over meanings of diversity and integration in their homeplaces, which they used to reinforce the eroding racial, ethnic, and economic boundaries surrounding their communities.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Hamer, 16; The Hyde Park and Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Societies are considered further in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

“BASTION[S] OF GENTILITY AND RESERVE”: HISTORIC PRESERVATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE LAKE FOREST-LAKE BLUFF AND SOUTH SHORE HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, 1972-1983

In the spring of 1987, actor Lawrence Tero, better known as “Mr. T,” decided to cut down over one hundred oak trees on the historic 7-acre estate he bought in Lake Forest, Illinois the previous fall. Numerous Lake Forest residents, unmoved by Mr. T’s hope that “removing the trees would help” his allergies, condemned his decision. In an interview with Dirk Johnson, a *New York Times* journalist charged with writing a story about Mr. T’s trees, William Knauz, a local Mercedes and BMW car dealer, said, “I understand he’s a good man, a religious man. But trees are sacred here. And when you rev up a chain saw, you do not endear yourself to many people here.” Resident Lucille Biety also objected, asking, “If Mr. T. doesn’t like trees, why didn’t he build a house in the cornfields?” It was not Mr. T’s first run-in with Lake Forest’s “leading citizens” and “arbiters of taste and decorum.” A few months earlier, the City Council had “admonished” him “for violating zoning codes” by building a stockade fence around his historic estate, located in a neighborhood listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A few people defended his decision to remove the trees—local student Maryjane Grant said, “He paid all that money for his property. If he wants to take the trees down, well that’s his business”

– but most seemed to agree with the sentiment expressed by Biety. “First he builds a stockade fence and paints it white—now this,” Biety said, followed by, “Oh, my goodness.”¹

The response in Lake Forest to Mr. T removing oak trees from his property, which became known as the “The Lake Forest Chain Saw Massacre,” stemmed from widespread local interest in protecting the area’s “visual character,” defined by its historic architecture, winding streets, and planned gardens and landscapes. Mature trees contributed significantly to the appearance of Lake Forest’s streetscapes. Lake Forest’s City Council agreed, and in 1979 passed a law intended to “prevent the loss of trees on public property and parkways while maintaining the visual character of Lake Forest.” Eight years later, in response to the Mr. T debacle, Lake Forest spokeswoman Char Kreuz said, “We take great pride in our trees. You can tell that by the name of our town,” and explained that trees outnumbered residents in Lake Forest four to one. Lake Forest’s care for its trees also captured the attention of the National Arbor Day Foundation which, by 1987, had “recognized” Lake Forest “as Tree City, U.S.A.,’ ...for seven consecutive years.” Trees were such an important part of Lake Forest’s identity as a “bastion of gentility and reserve,” according to Dirk Johnson, that Lake Forest alderwoman Mary Barb Johnson “promised to draft an ordinance to prohibit any further ‘outrageous destruction’” of Lake Forest’s arboreal landscape in the wake of Mr. T’s “massacre.”²

By the time Mr. T cut down his trees, Lake Forest residents were well-practiced in responding to threats against Lake Forest’s visual character. They had spent the previous three

¹ Dirk Johnson, “Genteel Chicago Suburb Rages over Mr. T’s Tree Massacre,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1987, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

² Johnson; Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society, “Timeline of Lake Forest History,” <https://www.lflbhistory.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Timeline%20of%20Lake%20Forest%20History.pdf>, accessed August 2019.

decades grappling with how to manage explosive population growth and, relatedly, new residential development, as well as how to protect their aging historic buildings and landscapes. They shared their anxieties with many of their neighbors in Lake Bluff. In 1972, a group of residents from both communities formed a local historical society in response to these changes, hoping to encourage people in their region to take the past into consideration when making decisions about the future of their communities. Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society (LFLBHS) members helped create a definition of local character that they used to evaluate plans for new development, respond to proposed changes to the physical landscape, and justify restoring historic buildings. They believed the area's genteel manor houses, estates, and other historic architecture, as well as its tree-lined streets and landscapes, came together to produce Lake Forest and Lake Bluff's unique character. Working through a historical society provided residents with a way to protect that character during a period of unprecedented residential growth.

This chapter considers how and why residents formed the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and South Shore Historical Societies (established in 1972 and 1978, respectively). Many of South Shore's white ethnic residents were leaving their South Side neighborhood for suburban Chicago, breaking up their urban villages as black Chicagoans moved into South Shore in increasingly higher numbers. Lake Forest absorbed population increases from the same wave of white ethnics, as well as people looking to move north from suburbs closer to Chicago's northern border. With population change came alterations to the built environment and residents in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, and South Shore formed citizen-action groups, including historical societies, to draw attention to new development's effects on their communities and shape local responses to these phenomena. Importantly, like their counterparts in Glen Ellyn, Rogers Park, West Ridge,

and Hyde Park, each society's members created and shared versions of the past rooted in a veneration for the people, landscapes, and ideas of an earlier age, which they used as a litmus test against which to measure proposals for new development and other changes to local streetscapes. And, like historical society founders elsewhere in metropolitan Chicago, SSHS and LFLBHS members used heritage to build barriers meant to limit outsider influence in their communities. But at the same time, the approaches they adopted reflected their own unique historical circumstances. They focused on each community's historical ties to "genteel living," creating historical identities rooted in upper-class values that they used to distinguish their homeplaces from surrounding towns and neighborhoods.

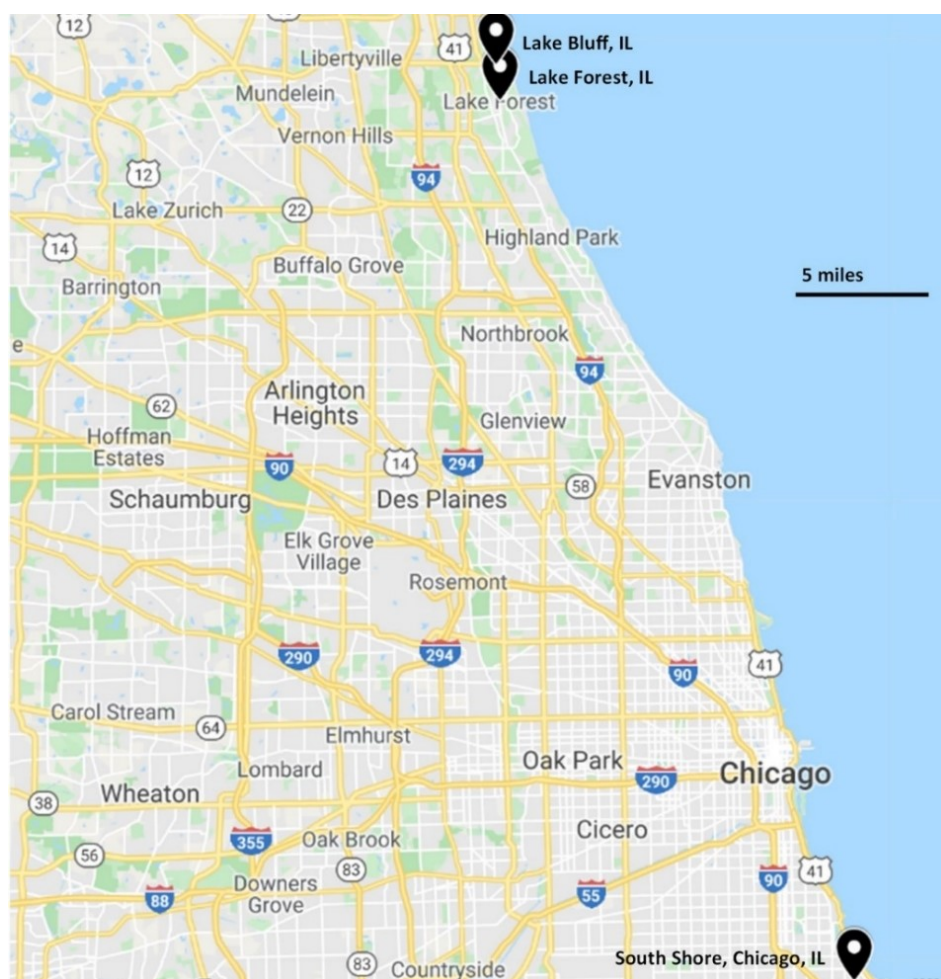


Figure 6. Map of Lake Forest, IL, Lake Bluff, IL, and South Shore, Chicago, IL.
Source: Base map from Google Maps.

Founding Moments: “We still have time...just barely”³

Elmer B. Vliet opened the first public meeting of the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society in the auditorium of Lake Forest College’s Durand Institute on a Sunday afternoon in October 1972. The historic Romanesque Revival building, designed by famed architect Henry Ives Cobb and finished in 1891, was a fitting setting for the first meeting of a group hoping to draw attention to and protect what they believed were the area’s most precious historical treasures. Vliet, the society’s first president and a former president of the Village of Lake Bluff, welcomed Edward Arpee, LFLBHS board member and local history author, who shared “interesting tales” about the local past (and whose wife, incidentally, was the granddaughter of the Durands for whom the building was named). Vliet also pressed attendees to support the society by purchasing charter memberships. Vliet, Arpee, and other board members may have worried about their ability to generate broader public interest in their project—Vliet had shared “sobering statistics about the life expectancy of historical societies” with local newspaper columnist Susan Dart the week before—but the response to their effort was significant. A couple of months later, in late 1972, Vliet told Dart “nearly 200 have joined the society” and there was “already interest in the next meeting,” scheduled for January 1973.⁴

The LFLBHS had been almost a year in the making by the time the board hosted the society’s first public meeting that October. The process began nine months earlier on January 31,

³ Quote from *The Lake Forester* article, January 6, 1972, LFLBHS collections.

⁴ “Elmer Vliet: Lake Bluff Leader, Community Historian,” <https://lflb.passitdown.com/stories/41965>; “Calvin Durand Family,” History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff, <https://www.lflbhistory.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Durand%20Family.pdf>; “Porter Congratulates Singer Publishing Company on 56 Years of Service,” June 8, 1982, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1982-pt10/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1982-pt10-4-3.pdf>, and Michael H. Ebner, “Lake Forest, IL,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, all accessed August 2019; Susan Dart, “The Forest Ranger,” *The Lake Forester*, column from October 12, 1972 and undated column from late 1972; and Char Kreuz, “Historical Society reflects on things that matter,” *Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Mail Advertiser*, February 21, 1989, all from LFLBHS collections, Lake Forest, IL.

1972 when Lake Forest resident John Sedala called James Getz to discuss forming a historical society for Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. Getz was then the president of the Lake County Historical Society, as well as the former president of the neighboring village of Mettawa, and Sedala likely called him for advice about how to establish a local historical society in his community. A few weeks later, in February 1972, Sedala met with twenty or so residents at his house on East Frost Place to continue talking about forming a local historical society. They all agreed that their area had “very cultural and unique history” and that they should follow the lead of “communities like theirs [that] have preserved their historical data for the benefit of coming generations.” Their county historical society—the Lake County group— held some materials about Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, but they decided they wanted something closer to home. When asked why a joint historical society for two separate municipalities, Sedala explained, “because we have a common border and we have grown together.” Vliet echoed that sentiment in his October interview with Susan Dart, saying “Why not?” He explained, “The same Indians made homes and trails in this area. The same French priests and early explorers were here,” and in the nineteenth century, “it was pretty much a single community with stage coaches running along Green Bay Rd.” It was only natural, they believed, that Lake Forest and Lake Bluff partner in the effort to establish a local historical society as well.⁵

The group met again on March 19, 1972, gathering this time in Lake Forest’s new Public Safety Building. They formed a steering committee, vowing to “bring together people interested in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff history...to arouse interest in the past; to convey an interesting

⁵ Letter from James Getz to John Sedala, January 31, 1972; LFLBHS meeting minutes, February 27, 1972; and Dart, “The Forest Ranger,” October 12, 1972; all from LFLBHS collections; and “James Getz, 75, founder of Mettawa,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1986, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-02-18-8601130164-story.html>, accessed August 2019.

background to school children and adults...and in general to do all things historically beneficial.” Later that day, James Getz wrote a letter to Lake Bluff resident Elmer Vliet to tell him about the meeting. Vliet spent his winters in Florida and so had missed the earliest meetings, and Getz wanted to make sure he knew about the local efforts to establish a historical society. Vliet was well known in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. A long-time Lake Bluff resident and former Lake Bluff village president, he was then a member of the Lake Bluff Zoning Board of Appeals. He was also the retired chairman of Abbott Laboratories—one of Lake County’s largest employers, headquartered in Lake Bluff—and former chairman of a Lake County Museum committee charged with directing a campaign to raise money for a new museum building. Getz believed Vliet could be an important asset to the new steering committee and encouraged him to attend the next meeting in April. Vliet agreed and attended the April gathering, at which point the group elected its first officers. A few weeks later, with Vliet as president, they filed incorporation papers with the state of Illinois.⁶

Six years after the LFLBHS incorporated opened, a group of South Shore residents met to discuss forming a local historical society in their neighborhood next to Lake Michigan on Chicago’s south side. On February 27, 1978, they convened in Thomas Neumann and Malcolm Thomas’ living room at 7321 South Shore Drive, a historic apartment building then under consideration for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. They explained, “We felt that many structures in South Shore were historically and architecturally important enough to warrant our efforts in uncovering and preserving some knowledge about our area [and]...we

⁶ Michael H. Ebner, “Lake County, IL,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago* online, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/706.html>, accessed August 2019; “Saving the past for the future is aim of group,” *The Lake Forester*, March 16, 1972; Letter from James Getz to Elmer Vliet, March 19, 1972; LFLBHS Articles of Incorporation, May 3, 1972; all from LFLBHS collections; and “Lake County Begins Plans for Museum,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1963, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

wanted to try to save...any worthwhile structures that were in danger of demolition.” The group also wanted to “purchase, restore, and maintain as a meeting place and museum, the property at 7651 South Shore Drive...,” a historic home that had been built in Michigan, “barged across Lake Michigan and used as a model house at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893,” and later relocated to nearby South Shore (see figure 7).⁷

Neumann and Thompson hosted the meeting in response to a phone call Neumann received from Bob Keeley a few weeks before about the house at 7651 South Shore Drive. Keeley told Neumann “it was about to be torn down” and he thought they should call together a meeting of preservation-minded residents to discuss saving the structure. Keeley, who would eventually join the SSHS board, was a former Executive Director of the South Shore Commission (SSC), a powerful local “improvement association” formed in 1954 to “save” South Shore from economic decline, who shared Neumann’s interest in historic preservation. Whether or not 7651 South Shore Drive was about to be torn down is uncertain—the owner had put the house up for sale—but they were clearly concerned about the future of the building. Neumann and Keeley feared “the house would have been sold to another buyer who might have lacked

⁷ "Letter from Thomas A. Neumann, President, to 'Members, Neighbors and Friends'," July 20, 1978; SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 1, spring 1978; SSHS Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 2, winter 1979-1980; all from South Shore Historical Society (SSHS) records, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL; The exact date of the first SSHS meeting is unclear. The first SSHS newsletter, published in the spring of 1978, explained that the first meeting took place on March 14, 1978, but a few months later, on July 20, 1978, Neumann wrote a letter to the membership in which he wrote that the first meeting took place on March 15, 1978. And the following year, in the winter 1979-1980 newsletter, Neumann wrote that the first meeting took place on February 27, 1978. Neumann may have made a mistake, or he may have been referring to more than one meeting.; The South Shore Historical Society considered in this chapter was not the first historical society in South Shore. At least one organization predated it, ceasing operation at some point in the twenty years before the society formed in 1978. See “South Shore Historical Society records” finding aid, Chicago Public Library, <https://www.chipublic.org/fa-south-shore-historical-society-records/>, accessed August 2019. The earlier organization was still in existence until at least the late 1950s, when the group held a meeting focused on the “Days of Yore” on February 17, 1957. See “Days of Yore to be Topic of Historical Society,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1957, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

interest in preserving it.” As a result, Neumann agreed to host a meeting about a historical society and invited several people to his home to discuss historic preservation in South Shore.⁸



Figure 7. 7651 South Shore Drive, 2019. Source: David Tooley.

Soon after forming, on June 25, 1978, the historical society’s founding members hosted a dinner to raise money for the purchase of the building at 7651 South Shore Drive. The organizing committee, which included Bob Keeley, asked Edward Rosewell, then Cook County

⁸ Letter from Thomas Neumann, chairperson of the 7321 South Shore Drive cooperative building preservation committee, to Mrs. S-Marie Crowson, co-op president, September 1, 1977; SSHS “Request for Financial Assistance,” 1979; “Biographies of Nominees to the Board of Directors of the South Shore Historical Society,” undated, but context strongly suggests 1979; SSHS Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 2, winter 1979-1980; Transcript from March 1, 1982 hearing in the matter of The Department of Revenue of the State of Illinois vs. South Shore Historical Society, 7651 South Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60649; Letter to SSHS members about annual meeting to take place on April 13, 1980, all from SSHS records; and “Fifty Groups Join in Drive to Save Area,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1954, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

Treasurer, to give a talk about the state of historic preservation in Chicago. Rosewell's comments encapsulate the anxiety felt by South Shore residents concerned about the area's historic buildings. "It is good," Rosewell said, "to plan, to build, to be innovative" but, he continued, "there is...a danger in this—a danger of destroying our historical landmarks which reflect our great heritage in Chicago." To protect their heritage, he argued, "The government should take, must take, a more active role. We have lost count of the many landmarks that have fallen victim to the wreckers [sic] ball in the so called name of progress." Despite this trend, they still had hope, he said, alluding to neighborhoods in Chicago where "young people are buying old houses and mansions and even factory lofts, to rehabilitate and to enjoy the splendor of these fine old homes." They needed to foster a broader appreciation for historic preservation, "something...we must work at as individuals, through community groups, and through our government" to achieve. SSHS founders agreed with Rosewell's message, believing successful historic preservation required support from residents and municipal leaders. They formed their historical society to unite preservation-minded citizens with civic leaders and influencers, hoping that their combined energies could protect their neighborhood's unique historic qualities.⁹

"In the midst of change..."¹⁰

The founders of the two local historical societies in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, and South Shore established their organizations in response to a sense that changes unfolding in their communities threatened to overshadow or erase what had come before. In January 1972, a month before Sedala hosted the meeting at his home, a concerned citizen—likely someone involved

⁹ Letter from Thomas A. Neumann, July 20, 1978; and SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 2, summer 1978, SSHS records.

¹⁰ Quote from *The Lake Forester* article, January 6, 1972.

with the efforts to establish a local historical society—wrote about how such an organization could ease the growing pains plaguing Lake Forest and Lake Bluff in *The Lake Forester*, the local newspaper. “Growth,” they wrote, brings new faces and new ideas into long-established communities.” As such, the author continued, residents need to consider “revising” some of the local governance “procedure[s] to reflect new viewpoints within the city,” as well as “devise ways to maintain quality education” for local students in an atmosphere of change. In addition, “in the midst of change,” they wrote, residents needed to remember that “Lake Forest has a unique past, one which should not be forgotten” and “pieces of the past, old photographs, documents...are in danger of being disposed of in secondhand shops for pennies.”

Accommodating “new ideas” and saving the past from “being disposed of” were not antithetical to each other, but instead would help Lake Forest “grow gracefully...anticipate expansion and change, and...plan intelligently for it.” Embracing old and new together could help “solve problems while they are still ripples. It is a rare opportunity in this fast-paced world—one which should not be ignored. We still have time...just barely.” The author urged readers to bring the past to the table when figuring out how to manage the consequences of growth.¹¹

The author of the January 1972 *Lake Forester* column spoke to a trend well-known to Lake Forest and Lake Bluff residents. Civic leaders grappled with how to accommodate the effects of dramatic population growth, including new development and necessary expansions to municipal services and infrastructure. The population of Lake Forest had doubled between 1950 and 1970, rising from 7,819 to 15,642 people (see table 13), and the change in Lake Bluff was even more acute. 2,000 people resided in the village of Lake Bluff in 1950, but that number had

¹¹ Ibid.

increased to 5,008 by 1970 (see table 14). Lake Forest and Lake Bluff were not alone. The population of Lake County, where Lake Forest and Lake Bluff are located, more than doubled between 1950 and 1970, increasing from 179,097 to 382,638 (see table 15). Lake County absorbed many of the Chicago residents leaving the city for its suburbs—movement facilitated by the expansion of Chicago-area highways and motivated by racial tension and economic disinvestment in the city of Chicago.¹²

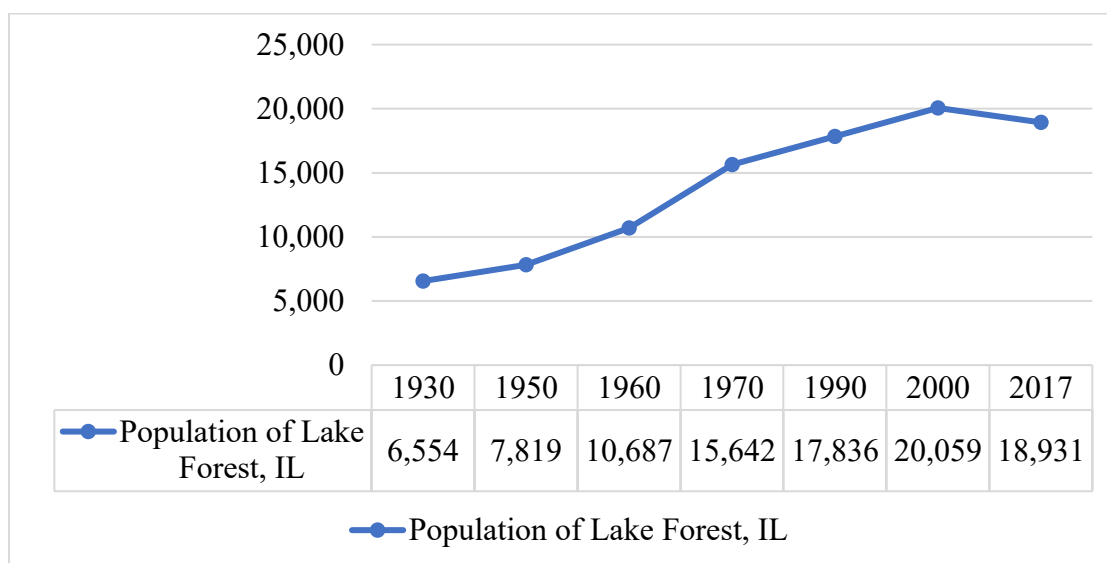


Table 13. Population of Lake Forest, IL, 1930-2017.

¹² Ebner, “Lake Forest, IL”; Ebner, “Lake County, IL”; Michael H. Ebner, “Lake Bluff, IL,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/705.html>; U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1950, 1970, and 2000, <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>; and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), “Community Data Snapshot” for Lake Forest, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/102881/Lake+Forest.pdf>, and Lake Bluff, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/102881/Lake+Bluff.pdf> [sic] both accessed August 2019.

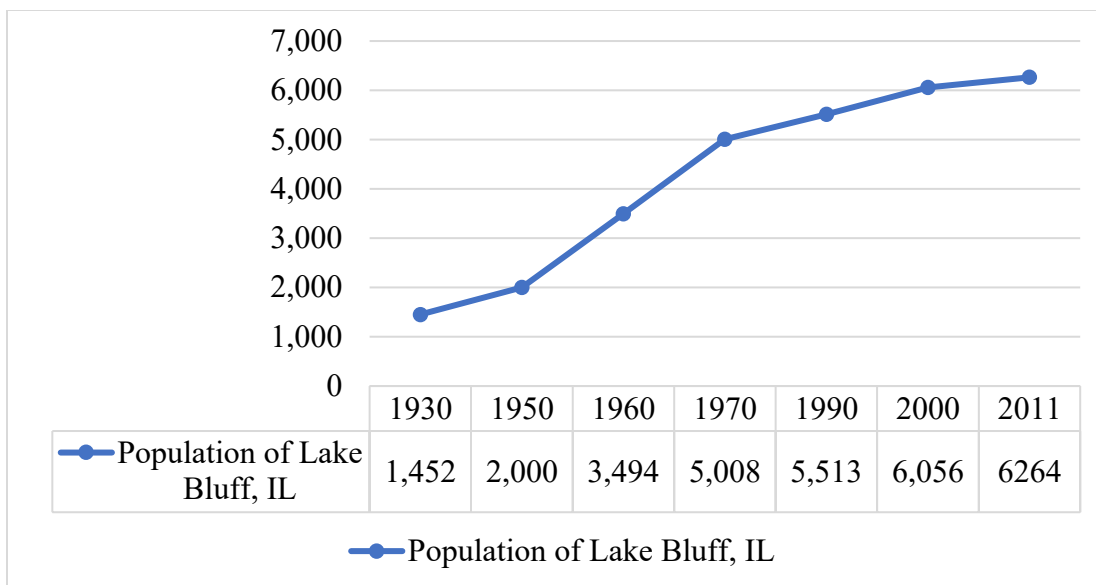


Table 14. Population of Lake Bluff, IL, 1930-2011.

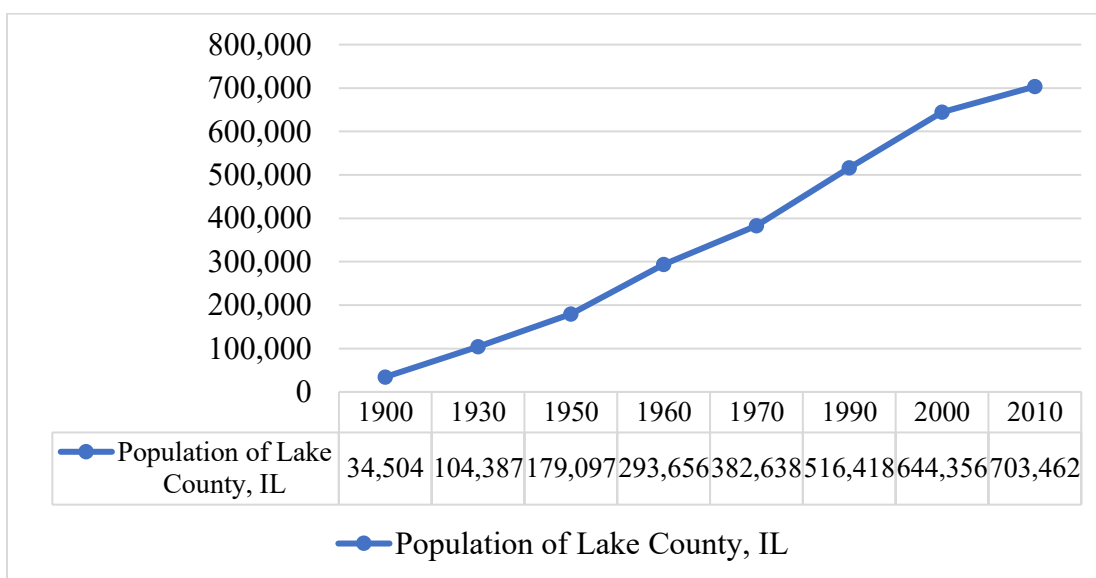


Table 15. Population of Lake County, IL, 1900-2010.

Residents and civic leaders in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff had been managing the effects of population growth and new development for almost two decades by the time John Sedala hosted the first meeting of people interested in forming a local historical society in early 1972. An “influx of young families” moved to Lake Forest in the 1950s and 1960s, attracted to the “country-suburban atmosphere.” Many moved to Lake Forest’s western reaches—a sparsely population section of the city with ample room for new, mid-century ranch-style suburban

homes. Lake Bluff also experienced increased demand for new housing, resulting in the village board's decision to adopt an ordinance "prohibiting 'look-alike' homes in the suburbs' new housing developments" in 1959. Lake Bluff's village president, Robert Curren, said at the time he "expected [the population] to double in the next ten years" and village leadership wanted to prevent filling Lake Bluff with long tracts of near-identical housing.¹³

Civic leaders in both communities also dealt with requests for exemptions and changes to local zoning ordinances. In 1966, for example, "the Kennedy development company" requested that "part of the Rasmussen Farm," which they hoped to turn into a new suburban subdivision, be rezoned to allow for homes on 1.5 acre lots instead of 3 acre lots, which would allow for the construction of "355 homes to be built on the farm instead of 270." "More than 175 Lake Forest residents," including the "West Lake Foresters," a "home owners group" formed the year before, "objected to rezoning because the land is in a flood plain." John Shields, president of Lake Forest's board of education, added that he worried about the potential strain on the local school district. Similarly, in Lake Bluff, "more than 300 Lake Bluff homeowners attended" a "public hearing" in May 1967 "to protest a proposed 51-unit apartment building for the southeast part of the village." The land the developers wanted to build on was zoned for "single-family homes only" and would be surrounded by "single family residences on three sides" if constructed. A group of homeowners hired attorney Gerald Snyder Jr., a Lake Bluff resident, to present their case against rezoning to Lake Bluff's zoning board, which was then chaired by Elmer Vliet. Snyder used the opportunity to encourage the zoning board to update its zoning laws to better reflect the changes coming to Lake Bluff. "I feel Lake Bluff's ordinances were drawn up many

¹³ Eleanor Page, "Lake Forest Attracts Young Families," *Chicago Tribune*, November 2, 1958; and "Ban 'Look-Alike' Homes in Lake Bluff Ordinance," *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 1959, both accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

years ago...” he said, adding “Besides...we moved to Lake Bluff for some small town living and to get away from apartments.” Zoning had an important role to play in how new development proceeded in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff.¹⁴

In addition to new development, residents worried about the future of their area’s historic architecture and, in particular, its stateliest homes. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of Chicagoland’s richest families built palatial estates in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. The Adlers, McCormicks, Armours, Cudahys, Farwells, Wackers, Ryersons, and many others—all well-known nationally (and in some cases internationally) for their wealth and influence—built villas and mansions with tennis courts, stables, and swimming pools. They owned or managed department stores, railroads, and companies like Morton Salt, Ryerson Steel, and International Harvester, and were joined on the North Shore by noted architects, high-ranking military men, and politicians hoping to enjoy an environment free from Chicago’s dirt, disorder, and labor unrest. By the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, many of these estates were left vacant or for sale as their original owners or descendants passed away or moved on. Some were lost to demolition, like “The Pink Elephant,” a large villa built in 1910. Its owners put it on the market in the mid-1960s but ultimately failed to find anyone willing or able to take on a “14-acre estate...[with] swimming pool...cabana...eight-room guest house...six-car garage...24-stall stable...[and] greenhouse,” in addition to the main house. In 1968, a developer bought the property, subdivided the land, and built a home with modern amenities on each of the smaller lots. The loss of the “Pink Elephant” was not an isolated incident, and residents feared the trend

¹⁴ Joy Baim, “Dispute Lake Forest Rezoning,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1966, and “Fight Lake Bluff Apartment Building: Zoners to Decide on 51-Unit Flat; Protested by 980,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 28, 1967; and “Plan to develop 640 acres opposed in Lake Forest,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1965, all accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

would continue if they failed to find other uses for these buildings.¹⁵

Residents of Chicago's South Shore neighborhood shared similar concerns. Both areas underwent significant demographic change, which brought new development and threats to historic architecture. But while Lake Forest and Lake Bluff absorbed thousands of new residents, South Shore lost 16% of its population between 1960 and 1990, going from 73,086 to 61,517 people. And while the population stayed mostly white in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, white residents left South Shore in droves while black Chicagoans moved in from neighboring Black Belt communities. The white ethnic enclaves dotting South Shore began disintegrating by the early 1950s as their residents took advantage of federally subsidized mortgage programs to purchase homes in Chicago's fringe neighborhoods and suburbs, made more accessible by an expanded system of tollways and interstates. Black migration out of Chicago's Black Belt to South Shore and other South Side neighborhoods, aided by the 1948 Supreme Court decision outlawing the use of racially restrictive covenants, hastened white departure. Just .2% of the population identified as African American in 1930, but that number increased to 9.6% by 1960, roughly 80% by the early 1970s, and to 97.4% by 1990. The white ethnic population, composed of descendants of "Irish, Swedish, German, . . . Jewish," and Polish immigrants, as well as white

¹⁵ Many of the wealthy families moving to Lake Forest and Lake Bluff in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did so to distance themselves from the poor and working-class people employed in their Chicago area factories, as well as the labor unrest provoked by the unjust ways they treated their workers. Their nervousness spiked in the wake of the Haymarket Square Riot in 1886, and these same families advocated for the creation of a north shore military installation to protect themselves and their industries from any future unrest. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of Camp Highwood in 1887, located just south of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. The name was changed to Fort Sheridan in 1888. See Edward Arpee, *Lake Forest, Illinois: History and Reminiscences, 1861-1961* (Lake Forest, IL: Rotary Club, 1963), 120-121, 256-257; and Eleanor Hannah, "Fort Sheridan," *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/478.html>, accessed August 2019. "Lake Forest Villa Ends Era," *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1969, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

protestants who moved to South Shore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fell from 89.6% of the overall population in 1960 to 2.1% in 1990 (see tables 16 and 17).¹⁶

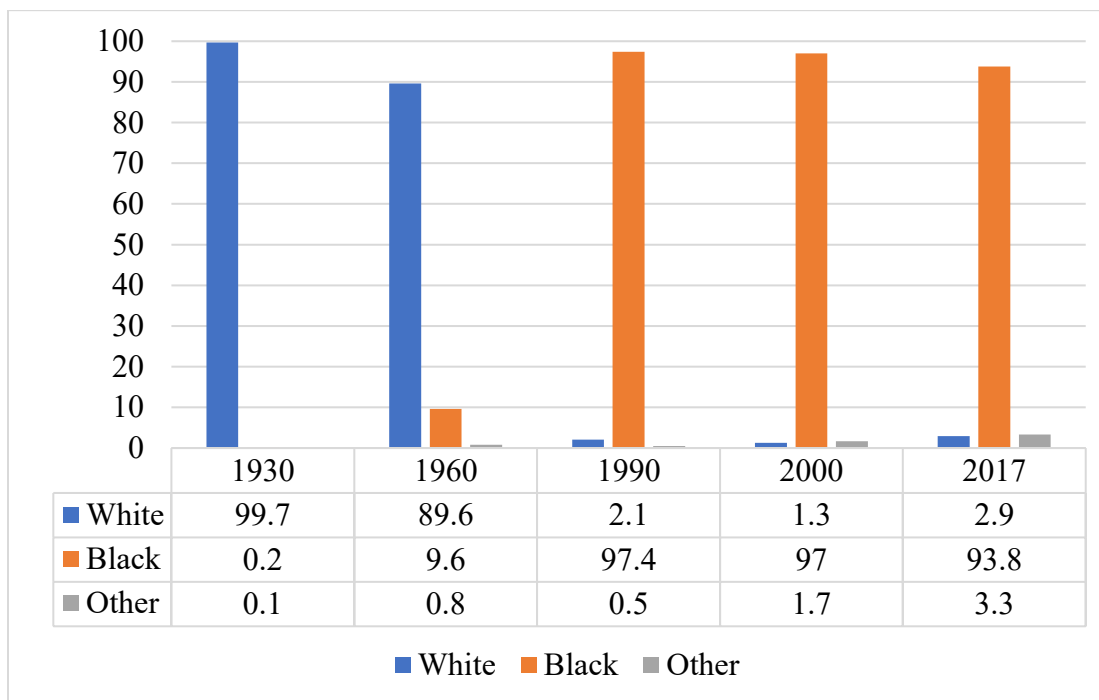


Table 16. Demographic Change by Percentage in South Shore, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

South Shore residents approached demographic change differently than their neighbors in Hyde Park, in which boosters, civic leaders, and University of Chicago officials responded with urban renewal demolition projects meant to reduce the number of poor black residents by limiting Hyde Park’s residential capacity. South Shore boosters, organized under the umbrella of the South Shore Commission, hoped to draw a different kind of urban renewal attention to South Shore. The commission was “thrilled by news,” for example, in 1957 that South Shore was under consideration for a federal urban renewal program that would provide “long term federal

¹⁶ Wallace Best, “South Shore,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1176.html>; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), “Community Data Snapshot” for South Shore, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/South+Shore.pdf>, accessed August 2019; and Richard P. Taub, *Community Capitalism: The South Shore Bank’s Strategy for Neighborhood Revitalization* 2nd ed. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994), 21-22, 31.

guarantees” on “real estate improvement loans.” Richard Jaffe, the Executive Director of the SSC at the time, said “This is a new departure for both the city and federal government in rehabilitating areas where no wholesale clearance is needed.” He continued, “We now plan to gather area property owners to determine which standard...we wish to maintain in the area.” The commission hoped this kind of urban renewal program would support neighborhood conservation efforts by encouraging white residents to stay in South Shore.¹⁷

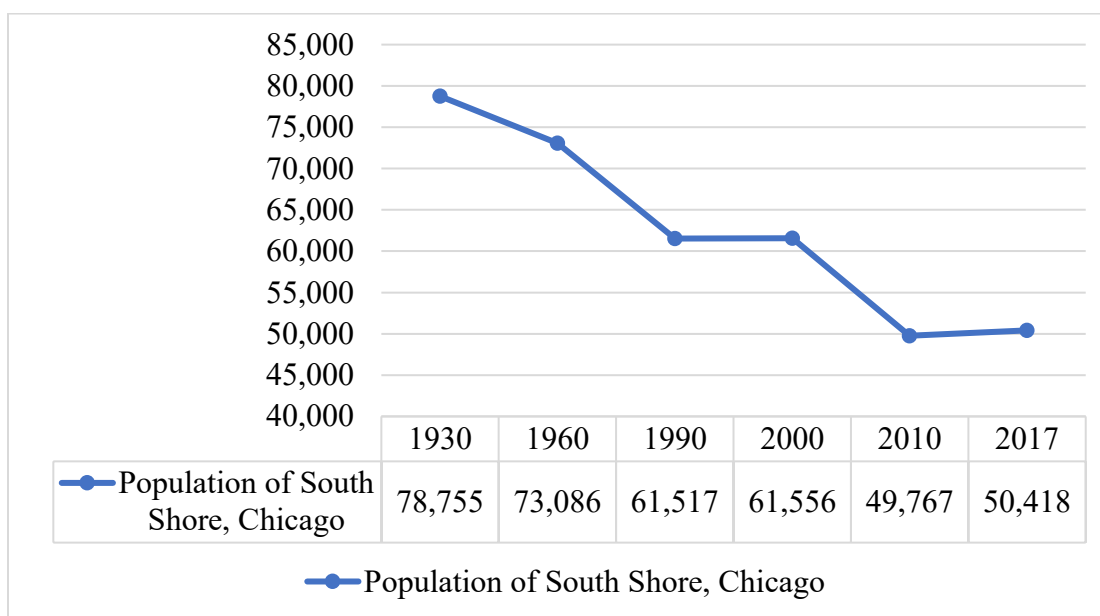


Table 17. Population of South Shore, Chicago, IL, 1930-2017.

The South Shore Commission, founded in 1954, played a significant role organizing residents in response to white flight and black in-migration. The SSC was “the most powerful organization in the neighborhood” by the 1960s and “was known as one of the strongest community groups in Chicago, even in the nation.” Efforts by the SSC and its allies to mitigate the effects of white flight—to “avert deterioration that has attacked other Chicago communities”—included “maintaining a fine community” by drawing attention to

¹⁷ Best; and “South Shore in Line for U.S. Aid,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 17, 1957, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

“neighborhood conservation, enforcing building, health, and fire codes, and combatting juvenile delinquency.” The commission “claim[ed]” in 1956, for example, “to have sidetracked 907 illegal conversions of housing units” in South Shore. Jaffe explained to a journalist from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1956 that the SSC “is on the watch for three types of conversions, some not illegal. These are...remodeling without a city permit, converting units in ways not conducive to community acceptance, and conversion...by adding families to a unit without making structural changes.” The SSC, like the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference (HPKCC), the Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC), and the North Town Community Council (NTCC) believed legal and illegal conversions posed threats to South Shore’s stability because they made South Shore more accessible to economically-disadvantaged people, and specifically poorer black people migrating away from Chicago’s Black Belt neighborhoods. An influx of poor black people would, they believed, lead to increased residential density and accelerated building deterioration, provoking more white flight and commercial and economic disinvestment. As a result, in 1963, the SSC began considering a “proposal for total community planning” that would urge “vigorous code enforcement and more work in rehabilitation of existing buildings,” as well as “physical improvement in commercial districts” in South Shore. As with the HPKCC, RPCC, and NTCC, the SSC became the public face of postwar conservation and development in its neighborhood.¹⁸

Initially the SSC board “fell along a spectrum from hard-line exclusionists, who wanted to exclude blacks entirely, to liberal integrationists, mainly educated Jewish professionals who

¹⁸ Best; “Fifty Groups Join in Drive to Save Area,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1954; “S. Shore Body Blocks Illegal Conversions,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 5, 1956; and “South Shore Group to Discuss Proposal,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1963, all accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019; and Gregory Squires, Larry Bennett, Kathleen McCourt, and Philip Nyden, *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1987), 132.

were embarrassed by racial fear and loathing.” The board decided to take a more integrationist approach in the mid-1960s when it became clear that none of their efforts would stop racial turnover, at which point they adopted a “managed integration” policy instead. After the SSC board approved the measure, Saul Klibinow, then chairman of the SSC’s “architectural and redevelopment committee,” explained that managed integration was “essential in order to achieve a stable, integrated residential community.” Without intervention, the SSC believed, white residents would continue to leave South Shore as black Chicagoans moved into the neighborhood. To prevent complete demographic turnover, Klibinow continued, “...all real estate transactions within the community should be approximately 50 per cent Negro and 50 per cent white.” Ultimately though, the percentages hoped for by the SSC were not reflective of actual demographic change, resulting in the decision by SSC leadership to “recruit” white residents to live in South Shore while “limiting” black residents. The SSC wanted to retain white families and draw new ones to South Shore, while at the same time ensuring black residents who moved into the neighborhood belonged to the middle class.¹⁹

By the time Neumann, Thomson, Crowson, and other South Shore residents formed their local historical society in 1978, the South Shore Commission and its allies had lost their battle against white flight. Black newcomers in the “1960s and early 1970s” tended to be middle-class, having “followed the same path taken by Protestant, Irish, and Jewish cohorts before them,” and “moving from...other inland neighborhoods under felt pressure from the expanding Black Belt.” But the in-migration of middle-class Black Chicagoans “slowed during the 1970s,” by which

¹⁹ Squires, et al, 132; “Shore Unit OK’s Policy of ‘Managed Integration,’” *Chicago Tribune*, November 24, 1966, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019; Carlo Rotella, *The World is Always Coming to an End: Pulling Together and Apart in a Chicago Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 185-194; and Taub, 29-35.

time “poor people with less education joined them in South Shore” and “as...[it] became a solidly black neighborhood, its poverty rate climbed.” The South Shore Historical Society was founded at this time by a group of white and black residents, though its leadership was mostly white, who had been supportive of the SSC’s managed integration policy but now worried about the increasing number of poorer black people moving to South Shore. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the SSC “weakened and faded into irrelevance and eventual collapse, with no comparable organization rising to take its place.” SSSH founders joined a cohort of groups, including the new South Shore Bank, emerging in the SSC’s wake to tackle projects related to economic stability and development. SSSH founders dedicated the society “to the preservation of historic buildings and gracious living in South Shore,” and, a year later, wrote “...we believe that the South Shore Historical Society has a real role to play in this restabilizing process. By encouraging interest in and appreciation of our past, we believe that we can help instill pride in the present and increase hopes for the future.” They hoped to mobilize local history in service of the work they and other local organizations undertook to influence decisions about the future of South Shore.²⁰

The residents who formed historical societies committed to local history in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, and South Shore did so in reaction to anxiety about demographic change in their

²⁰ Among the local organizations trying to bring economic stability to South Shore was the new South Shore Bank, formed in 1973. The bank’s original owners had attempted to move the bank north to downtown Chicago the year before in response to a significant decline in their “assets,” which had “dropped to half the total four years before” by 1972. The South Shore Bank’s desire to abandon the neighborhood provoked an outcry from residents worried that its departure would accelerate economic disinvestment. The four bankers who took control of the bank in 1973 did so under the aegis of the Illinois Neighborhood Development Corporation, a “hybrid company...committed to generating economic development in what had been a deteriorating neighborhood.” South Shore “was not yet in a terribly deteriorated condition,” and though “it had definitely begun to slide in that direction,” the INDC believed it could be stabilized. See Taub, 3, 21; and Lucia Mouat, “Chicago bank’s investment in South Side neighborhood stems creep on urban blight,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 3, 1980, accessed via Access World News, September 2019. Rotella, 170-171, 193-194; Taub, 42; and SSSH Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, spring 1978.

communities. As newcomers surged into Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, replacing the dying descendants of the area's wealthy elite, remaining residents struggled to balance the needs of the present with an appreciation of what came before. New development changed the appearance of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff's historic streetscapes while old mansions stood empty and deteriorating on vast estates. The residents who formed the historical society, worried Lake Forest and Lake Bluff would soon be unrecognizable, believed local history could help civic officials and local boosters looking for ways to manage the area's growing pains. South Shore Historical Society founders shared this belief and hoped local history could guide new development and historic preservation in South Shore. Historical society founders in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, and South Shore wanted to bring stability to their homeplaces, and they believed local history had a role to play in this process.

“A Conserver of Community Values”: Protecting Local Character in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff²¹

The LFLBHS' founding cohort began advocating for the preservation of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff's historic landscapes soon after forming when, in late 1972, the board decided to support efforts by Jackie and H. Brooks Smith to save Lake Forest's Gorton School from demolition. The Smiths had long been interested in local arts and culture. H. Brooks had been the chair of the Lake County Museum board, where he worked with Elmer Vliet to build a new museum in the early 1960s, and they had been “working on an amateur production of ‘Carnival’” in the Gorton School when they decided to save the building. He was also, according to his wife, “a member of one of the pioneer families of the city [of Lake Forest].” The Smiths hoped to turn

²¹ Quote from “Preserving history for future faces city planners,” *Lake Forest-Lake Bluff news-advertiser*, January 15, 1976, LFLBHS collections.

the building into a shared space for local “fine art organizations” like the historical society, that, according to H. Brooks, “never had a place to be.” They assembled a committee of supporters and worked with the city to envision a future for the building in which the city retained ownership and a non-profit board of directors oversaw operations. The Smiths and their supporters met their goal and opened the building to several local community organizations, including “scout troops, senior citizens’ leagues, art clubs and writers’ workshops.” Among them was the LFLBHS, which established a small office and museum on the building’s second floor.²²

The LFLBHS board’s concern for the Gorton School reflected their broader interest in protecting historic buildings in Lake Forest in Lake Bluff. They established a “Historic Sites Committee” within a half year of moving into the new Gorton Community Center and charged its members with “prepar[ing] an inventory on archalogical [sic] specimens, historical landmarks and architectural sites in the locality for preservation purposes.” James Anderson, an engineer working for his family’s business, established in Lake Forest in 1891, and whose family moved to Lake Forest in 1858, was the group’s first chairperson, but was soon replaced by Gayle Kenney Dompke, an Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council director and newcomer to Lake Forest whose thoughts about historic preservation captured the society’s anxieties about the built environment. In a January 1976 article about historic preservation and the city’s new comprehensive plan, Dompke explained that “for the last 20 years, estates in the city [of Lake Forest] have disappeared at an average of one a year.” “At that rate,” she said, “it won’t be long before they are all gone.” These places were what “makes Lake Forest unique,” and she

²² “Leading the way: Residents take an active role in historic preservation movement,” from “A Pioneer Press Newspaper,” July 28, 1983; and LFLBHS board meeting minutes from October 21, 1972 and February 3, 1973, all from LFLBHS collections; “Lake County Begins Plans for Museum: Board sets goal, names site,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1963; and “How couple saved Gorton School site,” September 12, 1974, *Chicago Tribune*, both accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

feared that “the loss of these sites will be reflected in declining property values.” They needed to protect the oldest buildings in the two communities, they believed, or face a future without them.²³

By early 1976, the LFLBHS Historic Sites Committee had identified “almost 200...significant sites” in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, adding almost one hundred to the list of buildings of “architectural or historic significance” to the Illinois Historic Sites Survey,” which “was part of [the] national program to identify historic sites” across the United States. The committee’s list included extant buildings dating to Lake Forest and Lake Bluff’s earliest permanent white settlement, thirteen of which they decided to honor with “special Centennial awards” in July 1976. Among these were a “farmhouse [that] was extant at the time the city was chartered,” a building that was “said to be the first concrete residence in the United States,” another where “President Abraham Lincoln [was] said to have visited,” and the house that “was originally the first store in the community.” The committee timed the awards to coincide with Lake Forest Day—an annual citywide parade and festival, then in its 55th year, celebrating the best of Lake Forest.²⁴

The Historic Sites Committee compiled their list and publicly celebrated some of its oldest members to draw public attention to their significance amid broader conversations about

²³ LFLBHS board meeting minutes from October 20, 1973; “Preserving history for future faces city planners”; and The Lake Forest National Register Historic District,” all from LFLBHS collections; “Collection SC/006 - Gayle Kenney Dompke Collection 1975-1979,” Lake Forest College, <https://archives.lakeforest.edu/index.php/gayle-kenney-dompke-collection-1975-1979>; “Anderson Family,” LFLBHS, <https://www.lflbhistory.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Anderson%20Family.pdf>; and “James Anderson Company,” <http://www.jacoengineers.com/>, all accessed August 2019.

²⁴ “Preserving history for future faces city planners”; “Thumbnail sketches of Lake Forest landmarks: 13 homes to be cited for their longevity,” *Lake Forest Lake Bluff News Advertiser*, July 29, 1976, LFLBHS collections; and “Parade and Fun Mark 30th Lake Forest Day,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 2, 1951, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

historic preservation's place in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. At that time, the city of Lake Forest had begun revising its comprehensive plan, hoping to resolve growing tensions between residents and policymakers who disagreed about how to accommodate new development driven by population growth. At a January 1976 meeting about the comprehensive plan, according to journalist Mike Pollock, "Plan Commission Chairman Henry Preston said he thinks the plan ought to provide some higher density housing for young couples, elderly and moderate income residents." To do so would require changes to local zoning laws to allow developers to subdivide large estates, as well as to build "under carefully controlled circumstance some higher density developments." Without "some escape vault in our [current] zoning ordinance," Preston said, "the result will be that many of these people will simply have to move. The younger people won't come to Lake Forest, and the older people will leave it." Local alderman James Morgan, who was then serving as historical society president, agreed that the city needed to find better ways to manage residential growth, but worried about the effects such changes would have on Lake Forest's historic architecture. In the case of the area's many early twentieth century estates, for example, allowing developers to purchase and parcel off portions of those properties created islands around which characterless suburban housing surrounded beautiful historic homes like, according to Morgan, "some 'grande dame' who has lost her jewels." But the plan commission also worried that an insistence that old estates be kept intact would backfire if no one purchased those properties when their owners decided to sell.²⁵

²⁵ Mike Pollock, "Urge city planners to consider history; future residential mix," undated, though archival context suggests late 1970s; and James Morgan, "Guest Essay: Preserve past in city's future," February 5, 1976, LFLBHS collections. Publisher unknown for both, though archival context suggests *The Lake Forester* or *The Lake Forest-Lake Bluff News Advertiser*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Alderman James Morgan believed the historical society had a key role to play in determining how to best protect the area's historic architecture. The comprehensive plan process provided the historical society with an opportunity to push for stronger municipal oversight over matters related to historic preservation. At the January 1976 comprehensive plan meeting Morgan said, "The purpose of the Historical Society is to make itself heard as a conserver of community values and to point out to city officials that there are other ways to handle zoning questions." Similarly, in a guest essay written for one of the local circulars, Morgan wrote, "It is not only with the past that the Society works, but also with the present and the future in the sense that what the future will be depends on what the past has been... Thus, the society is vitally interested in what the plan commission will recommend for action to the City Council." The society had a role to play in this process, Morgan argued, writing, "The Historical Society is... earnestly trying to get into the code some provisions for other uses of the large and imposing estates of the communities which were the glories of 50 or 60 years ago so that the character of the towns... will not be forever destroyed." He hoped the LFLBHS could help the commission find a solution that recognized that historic preservation and healthy growth were not at odds with each other.²⁶

A few weeks after the January meeting about the comprehensive plan, the LFLBHS board invited Paul Sprague, PhD, a "state of Illinois preservation consultant" who had directed the Illinois Historic Structures Survey, to testify at a meeting of the plan's advisory committee. They hoped his testimony would help guide any decisions the advisory committee made about historic preservation as it related to the new comprehensive plan. Sprague told the committee,

²⁶ "Preserving history for future faces city planners"; and Morgan.

“You have places, sites and structures that are associated with historic events and persons...All these make up Lake Forest. You don’t see them all at once, but they form a visual image that produces a character.” That character was worth preserving, Sprague argued, saying “there is a certain rationale for preserving the physical fabric of the past...the quality of life in an area is affected by them.” He mentioned “other communities in the country...using a variety of means” to preserve historic buildings, depending on each place’s needs, and suggested the committee explore approaches to historic preservation that might work best for Lake Forest. The plan committee agreed, and Henry Preston “asked the historical society...to act as an advisory group in suggesting steps to be taken to protect Lake Forest historic buildings.” He also asked the historical society to “make specific recommendations for action and supply the commission with copies of ordinances passed by other communities establishing historic preservation practices.” The LFLBHS board had managed to secure a place for historic preservation in the comprehensive plan and was now charged with imagining what that could look like in Lake Forest.²⁷

While working to fulfill the city’s request, the society’s Historic Sites Committee “met with Paul Sprague,” who “suggested that a separate organization be established for the sole purpose of preservation” in Lake Forest. As a result, in August 1976, five committee members, including Gayle Dompke and Edward Bennett, an architect, former director of the Chicago Regional Planning Association, former chair of the Lake County Regional Planning Association, and grandson of the Edward Bennett who co-authored the 1909 Plan of Chicago, decided to establish the Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation (LFFHP), now the Lake Forest

²⁷ Mike Pollock, “Don’t debase historic buildings in Lake Forest’ – Paul Sprague,” *The Lake Forester*, January 29, 1976, LFLBHS collections; and “LFPF History,” Lake Forest Preservation Foundation, <https://www.lfpf.org/about-us/lfpf-history>, accessed September 2019.

Preservation Foundation. They declared their intent to “preserve through acquisition, development, and restoration, selected historic sites, structures, and amenities of architectural or historic interest; to increase and diffuse knowledge and greater appreciation of such sites, structures, and amenities; and to assist through research, planning studies, acquisition of historic easements, operation of revolving funds, and related methods, the preservation and conservation of these cultural resources of Lake Forest.” Unlike the historical society, which focused on local history in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, the new preservation group organized to focus exclusively on “the preservation of historic buildings and landscapes” in Lake Forest.²⁸

Though a separate organization, the LFFHP maintained close ties with the historical society. Gayle Dompke, James Getz, Ann Cunningham, and James Morgan served on the boards of both groups at the time of the LFFHP’s creation and they worked together over the next year and a half to develop the recommendations requested by the city commission responsible for the comprehensive plan. During this process, on October 9, 1976, the LFFHP, LFLBHS, Lake Forest Garden Club, Open Lands, and Nature Conservancy organized a day-long conference, “Historic Preservation Techniques for Community Conservation in Lake Forest,” to explore potential solutions to historic preservation problems in their city. Edward Bennett opened the meeting at Lake Bluff’s historic Harrison House, saying he hoped their conference could help in “preserving the aesthetic values of our city.” He contextualized their local efforts in the growing national movement to preserve historic architecture across the United States, which he believed reflected a departure from “throwaway culture” and unsustainable growth. He was particularly keen on

²⁸ Gail Hodges, “Meet the Foundation for Historic Preservation,” July 28, 1983; Elizabeth Yarrington, “Preservation Foundation looks to protect town’s character,” August 23, 2007; and Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation (LFFHP) brochure, “What is the preservation foundation?”, all from LFLBHS collections; “Edward Bennett, Architect,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1994, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019; and “LFFHP history,” <https://lfpf.org/about-us/lfpf-history>, accessed August 2019.

“urban conservation,” saying conservation conveyed what they were trying to do better than preservation. “The urban conservation movement,” Bennett explained, “is working hand in hand with local, state and national government to develop strategies for managing change, for making sure that needed expansion is accommodated without destroying in the process the very things which make for surroundings of contentment.” They identified more with conservationists than preservationists, he said, who had earned the reputation of being “hysterically defensive, somewhat out of touch with reality,” and focused on saving only the “best...most outstanding...[and] oldest” buildings in any given community. This was not the case with the LFFHP, Bennett explained, which approached preservation in Lake Forest through the more holistic lens of urban conservation.²⁹

The urban conservation approach provided Bennet and the LFFHP with a way to call for more than the preservation of historic buildings. Historic buildings contributed immensely to local character, they argued, and it was local character they wanted to preserve. Bennett provided a definition of character during his speech, saying “Essentially character can be defined as the feel of the place: those elements which added together avoke [sic] a unique sense of time and place. Landscape, is of course, first. The physical topography limits what can or cannot be built.” Threats to character included, according to Bennett, “...the standardization of development, and the standardization of design...artificial siding materials have destroyed the special feel of vernacular buildings from coast to coast.” Paul Sprague also spoke at the conference that day, and his comments mirrored Bennett’s. He explained how Lake Forest was originally laid out and

²⁹ Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation, “Historic Preservation Techniques for Community Conservation in Lake Forest: Summary of a conference at Harrison House” booklet, October 9, 1976; and Historic Sites Committee recommendations to the city of Lake Forest, October 10, 1977, both from LFLBHS collections; and “1970s Grants,” Lake Forest Preservation Foundation, <https://lfpf.org/education-advocacy/accomplishments/1970s-grants>, accessed August 2019.

why, as well as how it contributed to Lake Forest's character in the present, and then asserted that, "Unless the citizens of Lake Forest recognize the folly to improve upon the original plan for whatever reason, and remain constantly on guard against attacks upon it, the day will come when this essential element has been so emasculated that it is no longer able to work its visual magic." Sprague believed Lake Forest's original plan played a significant role producing the city's character and that residents needed to protect against its erosion or risk losing an essential element of local identity.³⁰

James Morgan also spoke at the conference, though he did so in his capacity as a Lake Forest alderman and Historical Society president. He too echoed Bennett's comments in his speech, saying they needed to find creative solutions to the problems facing Lake Forest's early twentieth century estates. Developers had adopted a "cut up here and there" approach to these properties, selling off parcels of land and building new, modern housing to accommodate residential growth. Morgan hoped the LFFHP and historical society could develop creative solutions to this problem, bringing "orderly growth" to Lake Forest. Together, Bennett, Sprague, and Morgan identified the elements they believed came together to produce the area's unique visual character: its landscape, "physical topography," and historic buildings, as well as the pattern used by architects and planners to lay out Lake Forest's streets in the nineteenth century and the overall appearance of the streetscape.³¹

A year after the conference, in October 1977, the LFLBHS' Historic Sites Committee and the Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation presented recommendations for historic

³⁰ Sprague likely used the word "follying" to indicate that he believed any attempt "to improve upon the original plan" would be foolish. Speech given by Paul Sprague at the October 9, 1976 Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation conference, LFLBHS collections.

³¹ Ibid.

preservation to the city advisory committee overseeing the comprehensive plan. At the top of their recommendation list was the establishment of a historic commission that would create an inventory of historic properties in Lake Forest, “comment upon proposed changes affecting those properties...advise on proposed adaptive uses for obsolete Inventory properties...serve the City Council in conservation matters...and advise the Council regarding gifts of property, including conservation easements, which have historical significance.” They also suggested this “historic commission” advise the City Council on new construction projects to ensure the protection of the city’s visual character. They recommended a commission with seven members: the Director of Building and Zoning, a Lake Forest Plan Commissioner, and five others chosen by the mayor from a pool of nominees submitted by the LFFHP, the LFLBHS, the Lake Forest Chamber of Commerce, the Lake Forest Garden Club, and the Lake Forest Open Lands Committee.³²

The recommendations submitted to the city of Lake Forest include a definition of character as defined by the LFLBHS and the LFFHP. Their suggestions echoed much of what Edward Bennett, James Morgan, and Paul Sprague said at the historic preservation conference the year before. Their city, they wrote, “has an extraordinary visual character due to the preponderance of distinguished architecture, the 1857 park-like street plan which pre-dates any similar plan in the country, the variety of natural terrain from ravines to virgin prairies, and landscapes acclaimed for their excellence.” A city-led historic preservation commission could, they believed, help “protect the historic visual character of our city” from erosion by time,

³² Recommendations to the City of Lake Forest from the LFLBHS Historic Sites Committee and the LFFHP, October 10, 1977, LFLBHS collections.

apathy, population growth, and new development. If accepted, their understanding of what constituted character would be codified in a city ordinance and enforceable under local law.³³

LFLBHS members played a significant role defining what constituted “visual character” in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. They organized public programs and published local histories that highlighted what they believed constituted the most significant elements of the local past. At the very first public meeting in 1972, for example, local historian Edward Arpee “spoke of the early history of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, [and] “presented names of early residents and their part in the development of the community, and pointed out certain homes still standing today, once owned by these early settlers.” Historical society members celebrated historic homes repeatedly, awarding, for example “ten homes in Lake Forest and three in Lake Bluff...special Centennial awards” in 1976. All of the homes chosen were “over 100 years old” at the time, and “maintained in tip-top condition over the years.” Similarly, they maintained a “list of significant sites” in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, expanding on a list completed by the State of Illinois for its 1975 Illinois Historic Sites Survey. The historical society almost doubled the number of homes on the state’s original list, explaining that the “state surveyors missed” a number of important structures. By adding overlooked buildings to the list, they hoped to ensure their protection by city planners, who were then considering how to manage historic preservation under Lake Forest’s new comprehensive plan.³⁴

LFLBHS members shared histories meant to instill “love of place” among residents to create a network of people committed to supporting the historical society’s projects. Of course,

³³ Ibid.; and “Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission,” <https://www.cityoflakeforest.com/city-government/departments/community-development/historic-preservation-commission/>, accessed August 2019.

³⁴ LFLBHS meeting minutes, October or November 1972, LFLBHS collections; and “Thumbnail sketches of Lake Forest landmarks.”

many residents were already connected by familial ties, and through business relationships and social and faith communities, but the introduction by the historical society of an identity rooted in a shared pride in place provided them with a new way to argue for the protection of the area's visual character. Historical society members mobilized this network, and together they created a historical standard used by residents to assess future contributions or alterations to the landscape. They used their significant local influence—the historical society board included civic leaders and current and former policymakers from both communities—to advocate for the protection of the buildings and landscapes they felt were most important, reinforcing emerging ideas about what constituted local character and influencing public memory about the local past. In this way, historical society members protected the power and influence of the area's most established families, amplifying their significance by enshrining their stories in public spaces. They mobilized heritage in service of place, shaping local landscapes so they reflected what came before even as that era gave way to the demographic realities of the postwar metropolis.³⁵

In the end, the city of Lake Forest waited until 1997 to establish a historic preservation commission. In the meantime, however, the preservation foundation played a significant role protecting and maintaining Lake Forest's "visual character." The LFFHP undertook several projects in their first half decade, including "saving and restoring a historic bridge, public buildings and various amenities of the local environment," as well as "the restoration of the city's turn-of-the-century Chicago and Northwestern railroad station." LFFHP members also "observed meetings of the City Council, the [comprehensive] Plan Commission, and the Building Review Board" to offer public comment "on issues related to the preservation of Lake

³⁵ Carol Kammen, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, August 7, 2017, for *History News* 73, No. 1 (Winter 2018).

Forest’s unique character.” The LFFHP took an active role advocating for the preservation of historic structures in Lake Forest.³⁶

LFLBHS founders and members also played an important role in the effort to protect Lake Forest and Lake Bluff’s visual character, though their efforts likely impacted Lake Forest more than Lake Bluff. They worked with the LFFHP to develop historic preservation recommendations for the city of Lake Forest, successfully drawing significant attention to historic preservation in their communities and ensuring historic preservation would occupy a permanent place on the municipal agenda. A few years later, Lake Bluff residents Kathleen O’Hara and Janet Nelson decided to form a local history organization focused specifically on Lake Bluff. They believed the LFLBHS was “more interested in Lake Forest history” than Lake Bluff’s and hoped forming a Lake Bluff museum would provide them with a way to shine a brighter spotlight on Lake Bluff’s local history. Elmer Vliet, LFLBHS founder and Lake Bluff resident, supported their efforts and donated his personal Lake Bluff history collection to the new Lake Bluff History Museum, founded in 1982.³⁷

The people who came together in 1978 to form the South Shore Historical Society shared a number of characteristics in common with their counterparts in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. Residents in each place worried about the loss of historic architecture and new development effect’s on the “visual character” of their communities, and members of both organizations used

³⁶ “Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission”; James Karales and anonymous, “Saving the Past for the Future,” 1979, https://egrove.olemiss.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1890&context=dl_hs, accessed August 2019; and Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation brochure, “What is the preservation foundation?”, LFLBHS collections.

³⁷ Catherine McKechney, Janet Nelson, Kathleen O’Hara, and anonymous, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, October 3, 2019; and Lake Bluff History Museum, “An Overview of the Museum’s History,” <https://lakebluffhistory.org/about-us/our-history/>, accessed October, 2019. The Lake Bluff History Museum still exists today.

local history to build a network of people committed to the protection of a past defined by “genteel” and “gracious living.” And like their peers in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, SSHS members used their shared understanding of local heritage as a standard against which to measure proposals for new development. In Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, historical society members resisted apartment-style housing because they threatened to increase residential density, arguing instead that Lake Forest and Lake Bluff’s upper- and upper-middle class single-family homes constituted one of the most important elements of their visual character. In South Shore, historical society members also resisted development that threatened to make South Shore more accessible to the poor black Chicagoans they associated with economic disinvestment and urban blight. Instead, they argued for the protection of buildings and landscapes reflective of a past defined by “gracious” upper- and middle-class living. In so doing, they supported and partnered with other local community organizations committed to a local identity defined by an integrated “middle-class priorities—property values, respectability, propriety—shared by the growing black majority among South Shore’s leaders and the fast-shrinking but still influential white minority.” Together, they worked to limit residential density and restore buildings they associated with a more genteel period of local history.³⁸

Members of both historical societies used their organizations to define the historical parameters of their communities in an attempt to create a new kind of barrier to entry for outsiders. Efforts by LFLBHS members to embed their definition of visual character in local law effectively limited the creation of housing available to working- and middle-class residents and provided historical society supporters with a way to control who could afford to move to and live

³⁸ Rotella, 198.

in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. Meanwhile, the heritage barrier erected by SSHS members reinforced the invisible, but very real, line separating South Shore from adjacent Black Belt neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. When the historical society opened in 1978, South Shore was mostly occupied by a solid contingent of middle-class residents, a majority of whom were black. Despite the SSC's efforts, and the "managed integration policy" it adopted ten years before, black residents continued to move to South Shore, eventually outnumbering white residents by a significant margin. In the midst of this change, SSHS members used their heritage network to try and exert a measure of control over who could afford to live in South Shore—hoping to retain black middle-class residents and the few remaining white families—and reinforce the eroding barrier separating South Shore from poorer black communities.³⁹

A neighborhood "on the threshold of something grand...": Restoring "Gracious Living" in South Shore⁴⁰

Many of the residents who formed the South Shore Historical Society in 1978 belonged to an emerging network of people interested in historic preservation in South Shore. Founding SSHS president Thomas Neumann was on the board of the South Shore Center on the Lake (SSCL), an advocacy group that formed in 1974 when "thirty organizations coalesced" in response to concern about the future of the former South Shore Country Club, an extensive and historic property fronting Lake Michigan in South Shore. The SSCL led a prolonged effort, beginning in 1974, to turn the property into a public park, complete with a cultural center located in the former club's extant historic buildings. The SSCL and SSHS would eventually share

³⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁰ "On the threshold of something grand..." quote from Michele Gaspar, "S. Shore groups tries to blend past, present," *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 1978; and "Gracious living" quote from SSHS Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, spring 1978, both from SSHS collection.

several members in common, including Dorothy Gleaves, a SSCL president, Edward J. Rosewell, then the Treasurer for Cook County, the SSCL itself, which joined the SSHS as an institutional member in 1978, and Christ Fourkas, a former president of the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Several SSHS founding members, including Neumann, Malcolm Thomson, Ione Willis, and S. Marie Crowson, were also involved in the effort to place the co-op apartment building at 7321 South Shore Drive on the National Register of Historic Places. They all lived in the building, and Neumann led the co-op's Preservation Committee, which, in September 1977, recommended to co-op president S. Marie Crowson that the board of directors pursue the National Register designation. Incidentally, the co-op building was also the site of the earliest SSHS meeting, hosted by Neumann and Thomson in the apartment they shared. The co-op application succeeded, and the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 9, 1978.⁴¹

While waiting for an answer regarding their co-op nomination, Neumann, Malcolm, Willis, Crowson and several other residents founded the South Shore Historical Society, united in their desire to preserve South Shore's historic structures. Working through a historical society allowed them to draw attention to the architectural and historical merits of the entire neighborhood. A few months later, the historical society board decided to follow the co-op's example and file their own National Register nomination to place parts of South Shore on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. They hired William Hasbrouck, an

⁴¹ Gaspar; SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 2; Neumann to Crowson; Neumann note to SSHS "'Members, Neighbors and Friends,'" Letter from Dorothy B. Gleaves, President South Shore Center on the Lake to 'Friend'", November 1978, all from SSHS records; "Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club" archives finding aid, <https://www.chipublic.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives/>, accessed August 2019; William Presecky and Marla Donato, "Rosewell Dies; Serves 6 Terms as Treasurer," *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1999, accessed via ProQuest, August 2019; Christ Fourkas, "Community Leaders," *Chicago Tribune*, May 3, 1972, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 2019.

architect who had advised the co-op board's efforts with 7321 South Shore Drive, to conduct the necessary preliminary research, including a "survey of historical and architectural resources of the South Shore Community." Hasbrouck was "a past member of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Historic Sites and Structures," "a member of the Advisory Committee to the Commission on Chicago Architectural and Historical Landmarks," and well-known in Illinois for his work restoring historic buildings. Of the survey, Hasbrouck wrote to Neumann, "it will probably be the most important survey done in Chicago this year and for some time to come..." Hasbrouck, like the founding members of the SSHS, believed South Shore's historic architecture deserved special recognition.⁴²

Hasbrouck believed historic preservation had the potential to provide a measure of economic stability for South Shore residents. In his letter to Neumann about the South Shore survey, he wrote, "The benefits to the community is [sic] really huge... Obviously, community pride also comes into play in a project such as this. We have found that districts almost invariably increase property values without an accompanying tax increase." SSHS board members agreed. Ralph Austen, a professor at the University of Chicago in nearby Hyde Park and early SSHS board member, wrote that historic preservation could help in the "redevelopment of South Shore commercial areas... prefer[ring] adaptive reuse over demolition of existing commercial buildings." The SSHS board decided to buy and restore their own historic building for similar reasons. They wanted to encourage historic preservation in South Shore and planned to use their space as a resource center for local businesses and homeowners interested in

⁴² SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 2, summer 1978; SSHS Newsletter Vol. 2 No. 2, winter 1979-1980; Letter from William Hasbrouck to Thomas Neumann, November 10, 1978; and "Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect for Special Service" between the South Shore Historical Society and the Office of Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, December 1, 1978; all from SSHS records.

restoring historic properties. Eva Stone Duncan, another early SSHS board member, summarized the board's hopes when she said that she "fe[lt] that the South Shore Historical Society [was] a force for neighborhood identity and stability." The neighborhood was changing around them—they believed it was "on the threshold of something grand"—and they hoped to use the house as a hub from which to support the growing interest in development and restoration in South Shore.⁴³

The SSHS board began to investigate the possibility of purchasing the historic home at 7651 South Shore Drive soon after filing the society's incorporation papers. They explained the role they hoped the building could play in South Shore to members and potential funders, writing, the "house...will...give a sense of 'rootedness' to the Society, and serve as a home for the Society's growing collections of books, photographs, and documents." They "especially" wanted to collect "photographs of buildings, streets, and parks," which would help them advocate for the preservation of the area's historic buildings. The house, they wrote, would also serve a public, community-focused role, as it could "be a place where students of urban communities come to study, and where other civic groups can hold their meetings." In addition, having a building would help them in "encouraging an interest in and appreciation for our past...[and] instill pride in the present and increase hopes for the future" across the South Shore neighborhood—goals which "constitute[d] our real mission." They hoped a museum and resource library would support their work using history and historic preservation as a stabilizing force in South Shore.⁴⁴

⁴³ SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 4., spring 1979, SSHS records; Gaspar; Hasbrouck to Neumann, November 10, 1978.

⁴⁴ Undated 1978 or early 1979 "draft of a letter to former neighbors" from Thomas Neumann, SSHS president, SSHS records; and SSHS "Request for Financial Assistance."

While investigating the feasibility of purchasing the building, the SSHS board asked Hasbrouck to visit and assess its historical provenance and overall physical condition. Hasbrouck completed a walk-through of the structure that August. In a letter to Neumann explaining his findings, he verified the house's origins as a "survivor of the 1893 World's Columbia Exposition," and wrote it was "in remarkably good structural condition." Hasbrouck encouraged the SSHS board to apply for its placement on the National Register of Historic Places, writing "it would qualify for the Register both historically and architecturally." Hasbrouck's assessment gave SSHS board members the assurance they needed to buy the house, and they closed the sale the following summer on June 18, 1979.⁴⁵

The board worked to repair and restore the building over the next three years. During that time, they held board meetings, celebrations, programs, and tours in the house, and they welcomed researchers interested in studying its history and architecture. They tried to drum up interest in their project and appealed repeatedly to members, businesses, and local organizations for money to fund the restoration, but the SSHS board never managed to raise enough to do more than pay for immediate repairs and day-to-day upkeep. Their struggles to maintain the house culminated in a visit, on July 28, 1981, by an employee from Chicago's Board of Appeals and another from the Cook County Assessor's Office in response to uncertainty about the property's tax-exempt status. The SSHS board believed the organization's non-profit status exempted the SSHS from paying property taxes, but the two visitors questioned how much the historical society used the house in fulfillment of its mission, stating "the house was in terrible state" when they visited. After receiving notice that the historical society owed back taxes to Cook County

⁴⁵ SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1, spring 1978; Letter from Wilbert Hasbrouck to Thomas Neumann, August 22, 1978; and SSHS Newsletter Vol. 2 No. 1, Summer 1979, all from SSHS records.

for the Field-Pullman-Heyworth House, as they called it, Thomas Neumann, then SSHS vice president, appealed the decision and explained in a hearing with the Illinois Department of Revenue that the SSHS used the building for meetings, tours, and research. The Department of Revenue eventually found in favor of the SSHS and upheld the tax exemption, but the episode revealed how little the SSHS board had managed to restore the house since purchasing it in 1979.⁴⁶

The SSHS board struggled to turn the Field-Pullman-Heyworth House into a useful historic preservation resource but continued to support other local historic preservation efforts. They celebrated South Shore Bank's "excellent job...adapting the former hotel on 71st Street" and "converting this space into offices without destroying the character of the façade of the building." They praised another project on 71st Street as well, writing that the developers "have returned the façade to its original look." The SSHS board was particularly concerned about "the 71st Street Revitalization," as it was known locally—an attempt to restore commercial activity along South Shore's once-bustling main street corridor—and was glad to see South Shore Bank, the group responsible for funding most of the projects aimed at strengthening South Shore economically, restoring an important piece of its historic architecture.⁴⁷

In addition to supporting "the 71st Street Revitalization," the SSHS board brought local history and historic preservation to the larger cohort of groups engaged in efforts to stabilize South Shore. In March 1979, the Neighborhood Institute (South Shore Bank's "nonprofit affiliate group" committed to "community revitalization" and "community development") organized a

⁴⁶ Tax hearing transcript.

⁴⁷ SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1 spring 1978; SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No 3, fall 1978, SSHS records; and Taub, 31, 97-99.

meeting for the committee responsible for planning Town Meetings in South Shore, the last of which occurred in 1976. Representatives from the SSHS attended, along with people from the South Shore Commission, the Neighborhood Institute, South Shore Center on the Lake, the local Chamber of Commerce, and more than a dozen other organizations committed to participating in “community-wide discussion of development.” They wanted to organize another town meeting in 1979 to bring together local groups planning South Shore’s future and come to a “general consensus about future efforts in South Shore.” The historical society provided a way for its members, many of whom were involved with other South Shore organizations responding to new development, to draw attention to South Shore’s historic structures and demonstrate their economic potential to influential planning and funding agencies.⁴⁸

Though not united on how to manage every issue facing South Shore, the cohort of groups represented at the 1979 Neighborhood Institute gathering all worked toward economic stability in South Shore. For some, like the South Shore Commission, this meant maintaining a balance of middle-class black and white residents and cultivating conditions, like lower residential density and higher-than-average property values, that made the neighborhood less accessible to poor black Chicagoans. The new South Shore Bank took a similar approach, though its leadership was much more accepting of South Shore’s black majority, working to retain middle-class residents by adopting a “development strategy [that] involved getting more economic resources into the hands of South Shore residents.” Recognizing that “communities that were changing racially saw themselves being systematically abandoned by major societal institutions,” the bank’s leadership believed in the benefits of “psychological uplift for the

⁴⁸ Minutes from the South Shore Town Meeting Planning Committee meeting, convened by The Neighborhood Institute, on March 14, 1979, SSHS records; The Neighborhood Institute was, like South Shore Bank, an affiliate of the Illinois Neighborhood Development Corporation. See Taub, 5.

community.” While “supermarket chains were closing...[and] city services...declining in quality,” the new bank featured “a state-of-the-art and attractive drive-in teller branch, as well as a new parking lot heavily landscaped with trees and plants” to “send a positive message to the community: the bank was in South Shore to stay, and the community was worthy of a heavy, first-class investment.” Both organizations hoped to retain a strong contingent of middle-class residents committed to South Shore’s future.⁴⁹

SSHS founders and members utilized the approach adopted by the SSC and SSB. Celebrating local history and preserving historic properties like the Field-Pullman-Heyworth House could, they believed, instill pride for South Shore’s unique architecture among residents and demonstrate that people were still invested in South Shore’s economic future. On May 27, 1981, for example, Thomas Neumann, who was at that time the SSHS vice president, stood in front of a meeting of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) to protest the construction of a new 99-unit apartment building at 7301 South Shore Drive and demand the Chicago Park District turn the lot into a public park instead. He used local history to justify his call, explaining to the NIPC, the Chicago Park District, and the local democratic committeeman that open land along the lake front was hoped for and “envisioned by Daniel Burnham” himself—one of the two famed architects responsible for the development of the 1909 Chicago Plan. If that failed to convince the NIPC to reject the project, he reminded them of the NIPC’s own “recommendation” regarding new lake front development: “As a long-range policy, rights should be acquired along the entire Lake Michigan shore line in Illinois to allow for continuous public access to and utilization of all areas. No further development of any kind along the...shore

⁴⁹ Taub, 43-44.

line or into the waters of Lake Michigan should be permitted...” Allowing development on this particular parcel could set a dangerous precedent, Neumann argued, warning the commission, “...If this goes through, no part of the lake front will ever be safe again.” To Neumann and SSSH allies, Chicago’s history and the local history of South Shore played a central role in their argument. Whenever possible, they believed, they needed to protect Burnham’s vision for an open lakefront.⁵⁰

The historical society stood in opposition to the 7301 South Shore Drive project in solidarity with the South Shore Commission and the Openlands Project, as well as state congresswoman Carol Moseley Braun, who was a member of the SSSH, and the Chicago city alderman for South Shore. Neumann brought with him “petitions...signed by members and friends of the South Shore Historical Society who wanted the land, which fronted Lake Michigan, to remain “forever open, clear, and free.” The Openlands Project began in 1963 “to seek preservation and development of recreation and conservation resources’ in the Chicago metropolitan area” and, among other things, has “addressed the quality and quantity of parkland in Chicago neighborhoods.” The SSSH’s coalition built on efforts by Concerned Residents of South Shore (CROSS), which was also represented at the 1979 town hall planning meeting, to prevent similar development projects at two other vacant lots at 7401 and 7501 South Shore Drive two years before. Together, they opposed the construction of a new building at 7301 South

⁵⁰ The NIPC existed until 2005, when it merged with the Chicago Area Transportation Study to form the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). See CMAP, <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/about> and the Illinois General Assembly, Regional Planning Act, ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=2731&ChapAct=70%26nbsp%3BILCS%26nbsp%3B1707%2F&ChapterID=15&ChapterName=SPECIAL+DISTRICTS&ActName=Regional+Planning+Act, both accessed August 2019. SSSH newsletter, Vol. 3. No. 2, summer 1981; SSSH Letter from Thomas Neumann to Edward Vanneman, Jr. President, NIPC, April 22, 1981; and Neumann letter to Edmund Kelly, Chicago Park District, April 24, 1981, all from SSSH records.

Shore Drive and hoped instead that the Chicago Park District would turn it into a public park or wildlife refuge. In the end, the SSSH-led group won their case when the NIPC decided not to support the project, though they never managed to turn the vacant lot into a wildlife refuge or public park. Today, residents of 7321 South Shore Drive, the co-op building where Neumann, Thomson, Crowson, and several other historical society members lived, use the land at neighboring 7301 South Shore Drive as a private parking lot.⁵¹

Neumann and the SSSH board's efforts to prevent new construction at 7301 South Shore Drive, as well as earlier attempts by neighborhood activists to do the same at 7401 and 7501 South Shore Drive, belonged to a broader local movement to build a sense among residents that people cared about and took pride in South Shore. They hoped Chicago Park District investment in the area would boost confidence in the neighborhood among middle-class residents worried about the rising number of poorer black Chicagoans moving to South Shore, as well as the struggles to revitalize South Shore's commercial areas. Like the South Shore Bank and other local activists, the SSSH board hoped to use their organization's resources and network to help secure confidence in South Shore's future. In so doing, these groups, including the SSSH, consciously set their neighborhood apart from its poorer black neighbors by building an identity for South Shore rooted in middle-class values and used this identity to erect barriers between South Shore and the poorer black communities on Chicago's South Side.

The battle over the South Shore Country Club exemplifies how local activists, including people involved in the SSSH, mobilized a middle-class identity to protect South Shore from the economic issues plaguing South Shore's more impoverished neighbors. Lawrence Heyworth, a

⁵¹ Gerald Adelman, "Openlands Project," *Encyclopedia of Chicago Online*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/932.html>, accessed August 2019; and SSSH newsletter, Vol. 3. No. 2, summer 1981.

former owner of the SSSH's headquarters at 7651 South Shore Drive, founded the South Shore Country Club on a 67-acre stretch of South Shore's lakefront in 1906. The club, which "excluded blacks and Jews," the latter of whom "composed a substantial element of the South Shore population" during the first half of the twentieth century, was the "jewel in the crown of South Shore." The club's white, upper-class members had access to "a golf course, riding stables, bridle paths and a riding ring, a beach with a beach house, and clay-surfaced tennis courts" and the main club building "had elegant ballrooms and a dining room, ceilings held up by marble columns, and floor-to-ceiling windows looking out toward the lake." When the club closed in 1974 due to a steep decline in members—unsurprising given South Shore's transformation from a mostly-white to a mostly-black community and the club's continued refusal to admit black people—residents worried that the former club's extensive grounds would be put up for private sale. The Chicago Park District (CPD) purchased the property soon after the club's parting gala in July 1974, securing the land for use as a public park. Over the next ten years, local advocacy groups, led by the newly-formed South Shore Center on the Lake (SSCL) and including the SSSH, worked with CPD to plan the new park, culminating in the "rededication" of the club in 1985 as the South Shore Cultural Center.⁵²

SSCL and its allies worked with CPD throughout the process to make sure the new park reflected their aspirations for South Shore's future. In a 2015 interview with Carlo Rotella,

⁵² The coalition of groups led by the SSCL was sometimes referred to as the "Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club" (CSSSCC). See "Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Archives" finding aid, <https://www.chipublic.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives/>, accessed September 2019. Gleaves; Best; "South Shore"; Taub, 31; Charles Celander, *Chicago's South Shore* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), 35; Eleanor Page, "Help! Help save South Shore Landmark," *Chicago Tribune*, December 21, 1974, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, September 2019; and "South Shore Cultural Center Park," Chicago Park District, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/south-shore-cultural-center-park>, accessed September 2019.

former South Shore resident and professor at Boston College, about her dissertation “about black activism in South Shore in the 1970s,” Phyllis Betts recalled being “struck by the middle-class voices of respectability that she heard at public hearings.” She recalled, “One of the things that has continued to stand out in my mind... was black activists taking real issue with the Park District’s plans to put basketball courts and barbecue pits” in the new park. CPD also proposed “a scaled-down pitch-and-putt golf course, of a kind widely considered beneath the dignity of serious golfers.” Betts remembered the response, “Their attitude was, “You think that’s good enough for us? Basketball and hot dogs and pitch-and-putt?”” Similarly, when CPD began considering “demolish[ing] the Club building...and replac[ing] it with a concrete-block field house,” SSCL led a “coalition” of thirty local groups in protest against CPD’s plans and demanded CPD retain the stately historic buildings for public use. In response, CPD superintendent Ed Kelly famously “scoffed, ‘Oh they don’t need that [fancy building] down there,’ denigrating the cultural heft of South Shore residents.” The coalition disagreed and ultimately succeeded in saving the main club building. They also filed a successful application for its placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The South Shore Country Club had been synonymous with elegance and upper-class living for seventy years, and SSCL and its allies fought to retain that identity and legacy for South Shore’s mostly black middle-class.⁵³

For historical society members, the South Shore Country Club embodied the “gracious living” they vowed to protect and celebrate, and they used their resources to spread awareness about the club’s historical significance and support the SSCL’s efforts to preserve its remaining

⁵³ Rotella, 199; Gleaves; SSHS Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 2 summer 1978; and “Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Archives” finding aid.

historic buildings. In November 1979, for example, Robert Lipgar, PhD, presented a program about the club's history to SSCL members in a joint appearance with Ira Bach, chairman of the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks. Lipgar joined the SSHS board the following spring and presented the same program to SSHS members at the SSHS' annual meeting in June 1980. The two organizations also shared several board members in common between 1978 and 1983, including Thomas Neumann, Christ Fourkas, and Dorothy Gleaves, and the SSHS published a short history of the club, in cooperation with the South Shore Commission and SSCL, for SSHS members. The SSHS wanted whatever happened with the South Shore Country Club to reflect their economic aspirations for South Shore—a goal shared by the SSCL and CSSSCC communities at large.⁵⁴

Residents involved in the South Shore Historical Society used the organization to tackle several projects related to historic preservation and new development in South Shore. The historical society's founding members had a long history of involvement in efforts to combat the destabilizing forces buffeting their neighborhood, including white flight and economic disinvestment. They believed local history had an important role to play in this process and formed a local historical society through which to mobilize local history in support of local stability. When change and development threatened historic buildings and landscapes, for example, as happened at the South Shore Country Club, the vacant lot at 7301 South Shore Drive, and the Field-Pullman-Heyworth House, historical society members used local history to advocate for the protection of these properties, adding a new element to the arguments forwarded by the many other local groups committed to stabilizing South Shore. They used local history to

⁵⁴ "South Shore Historical Society Third Annual Dinner," June 29, 1980; Invitation from SSCL to presentation by Ira Bach and Robert Lipgar program on November 17, 1979; and SSHS, "A Short History of the South Shore Country Club," undated; all from SSHS records.

foster pride in and “love of place” among middle-class residents and to support efforts by other local groups working to bring city services and economic investment to South Shore. By strengthening South Shore economically, they hoped to limit the area’s accessibility to poor black Chicagoans, retain their middle-class community, and bolster the economic and racial barriers erected by the SSC and its allies.

Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and South Shore Historical Society members also formed their organizations in response to effects wrought by demographic change in their homeplaces, challenging developers proposing additions or alterations to the physical environment by demanding respect for their historic streetscapes. Their strategies often succeeded, especially when executed in partnership with other advocacy organizations, resulting in the production of local landscapes that reflected their ideas about what constituted the most important elements of the local past. They built networks filled with influential people committed to their definitions of local heritage and then used these networks to erect heritage barriers around their homeplaces, providing them with an effective way to manage outsider access to their communities.

While both organizations pursued robust agendas during their first decade, only one of the two historical societies survived its infancy. The South Shore Historical Society evaporated in the mid-1980s, fading away as early as 1983 as South Shore’s few remaining white ethnics followed the well-trod path to Chicago’s outer neighborhoods and suburban communities. South Shore was a “solidly middle-class African American” neighborhood by 1990, by which time almost 98% of the population identified as black. Not coincidentally, the South Shore Commission shut down around the same time as the historical society. The LFLBHS is still in operation today, having generated an enduring appreciation for local history and historic preservation in the two suburbs it serves. The work done by historical society members to

enshrine the protection of historic resources in local law helped to produce a network of people committed to protecting the area's visual character. As Laurence Teto can attest, threats to local character attract a barrage of local resistance, and the results are evident to anyone who visits Lake Forest or Lake Bluff.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Best; The Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society, now the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff, is considered further in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES IN METROPOLITAN CHICAGO TODAY: CHALLENGES AND NEW DIRECTIONS

On July 22, 2017, representatives from several Chicago-area local history organizations gathered at the Edgewater Historical Society on Chicago's north side. Attendees included board members from the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RP/WRHS)—the Edgewater Historical Society's neighbor to the north—as well as the Hyde Park Historical Society (HPHS), Ravenswood-Lakeview Historical Association, Ridge Historical Society, Clear-Ridge Historical Society, Southeast Chicago Historical Society, and Northwest Chicago Historical Society. The group came together to learn more about each other's interests and swap advice, but much of their conversation focused on their anxieties about the future of their societies. Each organization's membership numbers had been in decline for many years despite best efforts by their boards of directors to demonstrate relevance in their respective communities. Most believed they had to make some serious changes, and soon, to ensure their societies' long-term survival.¹

The July 22 meeting revealed some of the issues facing local historical societies in the new millennium. Of the seven societies considered in this project, four remain open today, and board members leading the RP/WRHS and the HPHS, as well as the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and Glen Ellyn Historical Societies, are working to secure their societies' futures in settings that have changed considerably since their founding. This chapter considers how society leaders fulfill

¹ Michal Safar and Dottie Jeffries, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, September 24, 2019; and Dona Vitale, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, September 25, 2019.

their organizational missions today and how and why their visions for their societies changed over the past five decades. It also explores challenges currently facing the historical societies in Glen Ellyn, Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, Rogers Park and West Ridge, and Hyde Park, and how people leading these groups plan to address these concerns.²

Ultimately, the difficulties faced by historical society leaders today stem from their shared approach to local history. Now, as in the past, historical society members and volunteers continue to study and claim authority over local history bounded by neighborhood and municipal limits and share histories meant to instill “love of place” among residents. But the urgency driving their earliest projects faded long ago, and the vast majority of people included inside each organization’s original heritage barriers have since moved on or passed away. Left in their wake are organizations run by a new generation of local historians, including many retirees and empty nesters, struggling to create sustained interest in local history projects and events focused on the veneration of the people and families who came before. Not all are willing or able to move away from the old model, but some are, and this chapter shares new approaches and initiatives adopted by local historical society volunteers (and, in some cases, staff) working to make their organizations more relevant and accessible to their neighbors.

Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society

RP/WRHS leadership jumped at the chance to attend the July 22 gathering at the Edgewater Historical Society. Dona Vitale, RP/WRHS treasurer, Kenneth Walchak, RP/WRHS president, and other RP/WRHS board members had long hoped to arrange a meeting between

² The first Rogers Park Historical Society and the Historical Society of Cicero, both considered in chapter 2, no longer exist. The South Shore Historical Society, considered in chapter 4, also closed. The Glen Ellyn, Hyde Park, and Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Societies still exist today, as does the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society, which is now called the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff.

leaders from Chicago-area historical societies and discuss mutual interests and strategic direction. At that point in 2017, the RP/WRHS board was in the fourth year of a multi-year effort to stabilize their organization economically by increasing the society's impact in their two neighborhoods. Walchak and Vitale joined the board at the height of this anxiety, in 2013 and 2014 respectively, at which time it had become clear that the society's programs and initiatives no longer generated enough interest or revenue to cover the historical society's operating costs. I also joined the board in 2014, along with two other graduate students from Loyola University Chicago's history department, and several other graduate students joined the effort as volunteers. As history professionals and Rogers Park residents, we hoped to help society leadership identify a clear path forward for the RP/WRHS and worked together to initiate a process by which the RP/WRHS board, volunteers, and other stakeholders re-envisioned the society's role in Rogers Park and West Ridge. The July 22 meeting presented RP/WRHS leadership with an opportunity to share their new direction with people facing similar issues at their own historical societies and learn more about how other groups like theirs were adapting to meet twenty-first century realities.³

The re-envisioning process undertaken by the RP/WRHS board in 2013 and 2014 marked the beginning of a new direction for the historical society. In the almost twenty years that had passed since Rogers Park and West Ridge's involvement in the Chicago Historical Society's *Rhythms of Diversity* exhibition, RP/WRHS leadership continued to run the society's annual house tour, publish their newsletter, *The Historian*, and add material to their collections. They also published two books: *Chicago's Far North Side: An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and*

³ Email from Ken Walchak to John Holden, July 8, 2017, provided by Dona Vitale; Vitale interview; and RP/WRHS Newsletter, Vol. 29 No. 1, winter 2013, RP/WRHS collections, Chicago, IL.

West Ridge in 2000 and *Neighborhoods within Neighborhoods: Twentieth Century Life on Chicago's Far North Side* in 2002, and continued to mount exhibitions and welcome researchers, though where they worked changed several times after 2003. That year, the RP/WRHS board sold the West Ridge building they had been using as their Museum and Educational Research Center since 1994 and in 2004 “moved into an interim site” on Western Avenue about ten blocks north of their first home. They moved again in 2010, this time to a storefront space in Rogers Park near the Morse stop on Chicago’s red line elevated train “while considering the possibility of acquiring [an] abandoned firehouse on Greenleaf Avenue just east of Clark Street [in Rogers Park] as a permanent museum.” The board spent a significant amount of money investigating the possibility of purchasing the firehouse from the city of Chicago, but the deal fell through after about three years of planning and negotiation, at which point the board decided to keep the RP/WRHS at its home on Morse Avenue.⁴

The RP/WRHS board’s issues with the firehouse contributed to growing anxiety about the historical society’s future. The group’s long-time leader, Mary Jo Doyle, died in 2007, creating a leadership vacuum no one knew how to fill. When she passed away, RP/WRHS board member Glenna Eaves said that the historical society was Doyle’s “vision. This was her baby.” Doyle, who Eaves described as a “one-woman history department,” had provided vision for the historical society since its founding more than thirty years earlier and the RP/WRHS board struggled to match Doyle’s efforts after her death. The board continued business as usual, but the network Doyle built and maintained during her three decades with the historical society began to unravel, taking with it many of the members, funders, and community organizations connected to

⁴ “Mission and History,” <https://rpwrhs.org/history/>, accessed September 2019; Robert Case, Glenna Eaves, Dona Vitale, and Kenneth Walchak, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, September 9, 2019.

the historical society by Doyle. The society's influence waned even as they worked to acquire the historic firehouse—a move they hoped would help them secure Doyle's legacy and bring a measure of permanence to the aging organization. But the effort eventually failed, leaving the RP/WRHS poorer and weaker than before. And without Doyle's vision and direction, the society's membership and funding pools continued to shrink, exacerbating the group's financial difficulties.⁵

In 2013 and 2014, a cohort of RP/WRHS board members and volunteers, including Ken Walchak, Dona Vitale, Glenna Eaves, Kay McSpadden, Robert Case, and Frank Valadez, as well as myself and several other Loyola history graduate students, initiated a society-wide conversation about the group's place and future in Rogers Park and West Ridge. Early in this process, some of the Loyola history graduate students involved with the RP/WRHS applied for a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grant from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) on the society's behalf. MAP grants support visits by cultural sector professionals (called peer reviewers by the AAM) to museums, historical societies, and other types of cultural institutions interested in assessing and improving some aspect of their organization. The RP/WRHS board hoped to use the grant to conduct an organizational assessment, which “helps a museum look at its operations primarily from the perspective of how well activities, resources, and mission align with each other, and with professional ethics, practices, and standards.” The application succeeded, and AAM awarded the RP/WRHS a MAP grant later that year.⁶

⁵ Case, et al, interview; and Trevor Jensen, “Mary Jo Doyle, 1939-2007,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 23, 2007, accessed via ProQuest, September 2019.

⁶ “MAP Assessment Types,” <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/map-assessment-types/>, accessed October 2019.

RP/WRHS leadership used what they learned during the MAP process to make several changes to how they fulfill the historical society's mission. The MAP process included a two-day visit from AAM peer reviewer Allison Weiss, Executive Director at the Sandy Springs Museum in Sandy Springs, Maryland, who facilitated a series of conversations between RP/WRHS representatives, "community organizations and businesses" about the role the RP/WRHS plays in its two neighborhoods. What we learned during these meetings led to the board's decision to redirect the society's energies outward—away from its collections—and use its resources to build community and connections between Rogers Park and West Ridge's many diverse racial, ethnic, and religious communities. After the assessment, for example, they organized a range of events organized around the theme, "Diversity," including programs with groups like the Ethiopian Community Center, a Nigerian restaurant and a Senegalese restaurant, and "houses of worship" located in both neighborhoods. They also pursued a project idea developed by Loyola history graduate students to publish a cookbook celebrating local diversity. This effort resulted in the publication of *The World in One Neighborhood: The Varied Cuisines of Chicago's Far North Side*, in 2017. RP/WRHS leadership also hoped to expand the topics covered in their programs, and organized lectures and walking tours about local bars and alcohol use, food history, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, the Glenwood Avenue Arts District, Russian immigration to Rogers Park, and local activism, among other topics. RP/WRHS leadership also partnered with the Roman Susan art gallery on an exhibition project, with staff from the 49th ward alderman's office to host an exhibition about participatory budgeting in Rogers Park, and

with local activist and Heartland Café co-founder Michael James to exhibit photographs from his Rogers Park collection.⁷

The RP/WRHS' new commitment to programming reflects the board's decision to shuffle institutional priorities in the wake of the MAP assessment. The society had long struggled to bring visitors to its museum and spent a significant amount of time and money, even before Doyle's death in 2007, maintaining an underutilized museum space and collection. The assessment process helped the board envision new ways to fulfill the society's mission and move away from a museum and collections-focused model. Instead of bringing people to a physical museum space, they decided to use local history to bring people together in a range of different environments across Chicago's far north side. In addition to new programming, these changing priorities contributed to the board's decision to transfer the bulk of its collections to the Northside Neighborhood History Collection at the Conrad Sulzer branch of the Chicago Public Library (CPL). The arrangement removes the burden of care from this historical society, and the RP/WRHS board can borrow pieces from the collection for use in exhibits and programs. The move also makes the collection more accessible to researchers. As part of the CPL system, the Sulzer has access to archival resources and labor far beyond the historical society's reach. The MAP assessment also contributed to the board's decision to keep the organization at 7363 North Greenview Avenue in Rogers Park (see figure 8)—a move the board made in August 2015 when rising rent, water leaks, and insect and rodent infestations at the Morse Avenue location led to a search for a new space. The Greenview location lacks room for much beyond small displays, a work area, and a conference table, and would have been inadequate for the historical society as it

⁷ RP/WRHS upcoming and previous events, <https://rpwrhs.org/programs/>, accessed October 2019; and Case, et al interview. Email from Kay McSpadden to RP/WRHS board, February 22, 2016 and MAP site visit final schedule, March 3, 2016, both internal RP/WRHS email correspondence.

existed in 2013, but it suits the board's new approach to fulfilling the historical society's mission.⁸



Figure 8. Looking into the RP/WRHS office at 7363 North Greenview Avenue, 2019.
Source: Stephanie Barto.

The changes made by the RP/WRHS board in response to the MAP assessment brought a measure of financial stability to the historical society. Hosting programs and fundraisers in partnership with other neighborhood organizations and cultural groups helps the RP/WRHS board reach new audiences and demonstrate local history's relevance in creative ways, and fees paid by new members who join as a result of these efforts bring much-needed money to the society's operating budget. In addition, the society's major fundraising events generate more attendance and income than they did at the beginning of the assessment process in 2014, an

⁸ Case, et al interview.

outcome resulting from efforts by board members to adopt new approaches to marketing, outreach, and donor solicitation. A recent initiative to research property history for inquiring homeowners also promises to generate interest in and revenue for the historical society.⁹

The RP/WRHS board managed to stabilize the society's finances and increase resident engagement with the RP/WRHS but have been less successful in their attempts to reach and build relationships with Latino, black, and South Asian residents. In preparation for the July 22, 2017 meeting at the Edgewater Historical Society, Dona Vitale wrote, "Historically, our audience was composed primarily of the older, more established white homeowners.... a group that represents only a very small proportion of our diverse community. We are actively working to attract newer, younger residents, including the many renters in our neighborhoods, as well as ethnic minorities who have not been well-represented in the Society or in the presentation of our neighborhood history." Today, Chicago's far north side is home to one of the city's most diverse populations, reflecting the results of a demographic trend that began in Rogers Park in the 1970s, accelerated rapidly in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, and was replicated soon after, though to a slightly lesser extent, in neighboring West Ridge. RP/WRHS leadership has long celebrated local diversity, and even contributed in the 1990s to the formation of a local identity rooted in diversity, but never successfully developed lasting connections with any significant number of non-white residents. Since 1975 and for much of the society's existence, most of its members have been older white people who grew up in Rogers Park and West Ridge or who had ties to the area through family or business. Some live in Rogers Park and West Ridge today, and many

⁹ Ibid.

others live in Chicago's northern suburbs, having moved out of the city between the 1960s and the new millennium.¹⁰

RP/WRHS leadership has also struggled to draw younger residents into the organization. In a September 2019 interview with me, Dona Vitale, Kenneth Walchak, and Robert Case, Eaves explained, "I think that's our missing demographic...young families, because we don't do really family-friendly things...When Mary Jo was around we always did what she called the Founder's Day picnic...You would have families involved in that...It was just a big picnic essentially, and it was only once a year, but that seemed to bring people who had young families out, as well as the old-timers. But I don't see us having that impact now." Vitale agreed, noting that "The trick is finding topics that would get some of these other audiences in." Eaves believes the board's lack of experience in education contributes to their difficulty. She said, "...I think we're...challenged because I'm not sure we have people...with expertise in education, and that really is something I think that you need to have." More recently, new members have included "high-income" white residents, often younger than the average RP/WRHS member, purchasing some of the area's more expensive residential properties. They buck the mold but are not yet joining in numbers sufficient to replace the aging white ethnic cohort that supported the historical society for so long.¹¹

Today, RP/WRHS leadership remains unsure how to approach their membership problem. They managed to increase the society's membership numbers over the past five years, but those numbers are not representative of the area's broader demographic makeup. When asked

¹⁰ Questionnaire from RP/WRHS in preparation for July 22, 2017 meeting at the Edgewater Historical Society, internal RP/WRHS document; Charts depicting demographic change in Rogers Park and West Ridge can be found in chapter 3.

¹¹ Case, et al interview.

about the board's efforts to diversify the membership, Vitale said, "We are kind of reaching new people, what we're not reaching is the immigrant communities... We still just can't seem to..." Eaves agreed, saying, "You have to have somebody from that community as an insider in order to do it..." In addition, though new members include many young newcomers, they do not participate in society activities in the same way as members from earlier decades. To the board's disappointment, most younger members do not try to deepen their relationship with the historical society by joining its board or any of its committees. Their interest generally extends to RP/WRHS programs, the annual House Tour fundraiser, and, more recently, the new property research service, but not beyond. RP/WRHS leadership managed to bring a measure of financial stability to the historical society but continue to struggle with how to draw the kind of sustained engagement needed to ensure the organization's long-term survival.¹²

Hyde Park Historical Society

Hyde Park Historical Society (HPHS) leadership faces many of the same issues as their counterparts in Rogers Park and West Ridge. Like Vitale and Walchak from the RP/WRHS, Michal Safar, HPHS president, attended the 2017 meeting at the Edgewater Historical Society to talk about the state of her historical society and consider its future in a metropolis that looks very different than it did when HPHS founders established their organization in 1976. Safar, a librarian by profession, moved to Hyde Park in 1984 and, she recalled, "spent 20 years here without any involvement in the local community." She finally purchased a HPHS membership in 2004, drawn to the society's historical collections, which she took responsibility for when she joined the board of directors as the society's archivist in 2007. The relationship established

¹² Ibid.

between the HPHS and the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library by university archivist and HPHS founder Jean Block in 1976 is still in place, and the HPHS' collections are housed in the university's special collections. Safar took over as HPHS president in 2015 and serves as both president and archivist today.¹³

I met Safar for an interview at the society's historic cable car building in late September 2019. Incidentally, our interview overlapped with a visit from a Home Depot technician who came out to measure the interior window dimensions so the society could order new blinds. The window coverings were especially important, Safar explained, because the society completed a window and door restoration the year before. The technician asked the usual questions about materials and measurements while he worked, but also inquired about the building's history, seemingly struck by its unusual appearance and strange location. The one-story, brick building stands out without trying, the lone building punctuating an otherwise uninterrupted and unremarkable concrete retaining wall. The retaining wall supports a tall embankment, at the top of which sit train tracks used today by Metra, the Chicago area commuter rail service. Safar explained the structure's significance (according to the HPHS newsletter, it is, among other things, "the lone reminder of the Chicago City Railroad") and how the society works hard to maintain its historic aesthetic both inside and out. HPHS founders restored the interior to look like a waiting area for a nineteenth-century train station and prints and maps depicting scenes and street plans from a century or more in the past adorn its walls. When I arrived for our

¹³ Safar and Jeffries interview.

interview, I felt like I stepped into the historical society's headquarters as it must have existed when Clyde Watkins, Devereux Bowly, and Leon Despres opened it to the public in 1980.¹⁴

In many ways, the HPHS looks and feels very much the same as it did in the decade after its founding, and efforts by board members and volunteers today would look familiar to any of the HPHS' founding members. According to Safar, "The mission of the historical society is pretty much unchanged from the original mission," which states a commitment to "record Hyde Park's history, preserve selected artifacts and documents of that history for exhibition and research, promote public interest in Hyde Park and preservation of its history, [and] educate and involve individual and groups in an appreciation and understanding of Hyde Park's heritage." In addition, Safar said, "We did a strategic planning session back in 2011 or '12 and invited the entire community to come to it and we revisited all of these mission statements and agreed that that's really what we should be doing and that's pretty much what we've been doing all along. The methods by which we accomplish those objectives have evolved over time, but the basic objectives are pretty much the same." HPHS leaders organize programs about Hyde Park's history, present awards, design exhibits, collect documents and artifacts related to Hyde Park's past, publish a newsletter, record oral histories, and "respond to inquiries."¹⁵

The HPHS also continues to advocate for the preservation of Hyde Park's built environment and, as in the past, often does this work in conversation with other groups interested in local development and conservation. Safar used the public meetings about the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) to demonstrate this point, explaining how two HPHS board members

¹⁴ Ibid.; and *Hyde Park History* newsletter, Vol. 40 No. 3, autumn 2018, HPHS collections, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL.

¹⁵ "Hyde Park Historical Society Mission/Purpose, Scope and Current Activities" document, HPHS.

also belonged to the Jackson Park (the proposed location for the OPC) Advisory Council, and worked with a third HPHS board member on “the section 106 [review] for the...Center.” Similarly, the HPHS board “partnered with [the local Chamber of Commerce] on a National Trust for Historic Preservation grant opportunity” and “interact on a regular basis” with Chamber of Commerce staff, as well as check in periodically with the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference. The network used by founding historical society members still exists and members rely on its connections to amplify their advocacy efforts.¹⁶

The HPHS looks much the same as it always has, but, like the RP/WRHS, faces an uncertain future. The membership is “clearly aging,” according to Safar and the HPHS board is “trying to keep the organization relevant,” she explained, because “we do provide an important public service.” As a result, they introduced some small but significant changes in recent years in an effort to reach new and larger audiences. In 2015, for example, Safar, as HPHS president, and Allison Hartman from Chicago Hyde Park Village—an organization that “help[s] older residents...stay in their homes and provide[s] social outlets...essentially a seniors group”—cofounded a local book club. They allow anyone to participate, and “discuss anything to do with Hyde Park—Hyde Park authors, Hyde Park history, novels set in Hyde Park...” The HPHS partnership with Chicago Hyde Park Village also led to a regular co-hosted game night, where attendees play games like mahjong and bridge at the HPHS headquarters. The HPHS board also hosts programs at off-site venues in an effort to reach new audiences. According to Safar, HPHS board member Dottie Jeffries organized a recent “panel discussion” featuring representatives from four local booksellers and held it at 57th Street Wines, a much larger venue located two

¹⁶ Safar and Jeffries interview.

blocks from the historical society. They also held an oral history program at Montgomery Place, a local retirement community, about the 125th anniversary of Hyde Park's University Church. Both events drew people from the wine shop, church, and retirement community, helping HPHS leadership reach new audiences. But despite these changes, Safar explained, "We aren't replacing [members] with younger people at a rate that is going to be viable long-term." Their efforts have not yet yielded the kind of response needed to sustain the HPHS far into the future.¹⁷

Glen Ellyn Historical Society

A few weeks after my visit to the Hyde Park Historical Society, I took the commuter rail west from Chicago to Glen Ellyn to interview Glen Ellyn Historical Society president Suzanne Carty. I opted to walk the mile between Glen Ellyn's commuter rail station and the historical society headquarters, which took me down a long residential stretch of Glen Ellyn's historic Main Street. I walked by at least a dozen, private nineteenth-century homes featuring Glen Ellyn Historical Society plaques (see figure 9), as well as village markers announcing the location of two nonextant historic homesteads placed on the National Register of Historic Places. I also passed several properties displaying lawn signs advocating for "Save Main," a movement "support[ing] smart development that promotes economic growth in Glen Ellyn while preserving the unique identity, distinct charm, and historic character of the village" (see figure 10). Residents formed Save Main to "oppose the five-story, mixed-use development known as Apex 400," which they "believe...will dominate the skyline and forever diminish the character of" Glen Ellyn. It would be clear to most anyone walking this particular stretch of Main Street that Glen Ellyn residents place a high value on a local history and historic preservation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.; and *Hyde Park History* newsletter, Vol. 40 No. 3, autumn 2018, HPHS.

¹⁸ "Save Main," <https://savemainge.org/>, accessed October 2019.



Figure 9. Glen Ellyn home with white GEHS historic marker on front porch (see bottom left), October 2019. Source: Author's collection.

GEHS founders and members helped generate the interest in local history and preservation evident along Main Street. Today, the GEHS operates out of a village-owned building on the southwest corner of a major intersection known as “Stacy’s Corners.” The GEHS raised money to fund the building restoration and the village rents the space to the GEHS for a nominal annual fee. The GEHS houses its archives here, as well as a gift shop known as “Stacy’s Corners Store,” and holds programs in a large event space in the back of the building. Stacy’s Tavern, the building the GEHS formed to save and restore in partnership with the village of Glen

Ellyn in 1968, sits just north and within sight of the GEHS, which opens the historic 1846 tavern to visitors for a few hours two days a week.¹⁹



Figure 10. “Save Main” lawn sign in front of Main Street home with GEHS historic marker, October 2019. Source: Author’s collection.

The GEHS mission remains much the same today as it did in 1968, though its temporal scope expanded greatly after the GEHS dedicated and opened Stacy’s Tavern to the public (after an eight-year restoration) on July 4, 1976. According to Carty, GEHS members strive to “educate and hopefully inspire interest in our local history and community and regional history,” continuing the work GEHS founders began over fifty years ago. But today, GEHS leaders focus their efforts on a much broader period of time than when the GEHS first opened. Carty explained, “When it was first established the organization was solely focused on the museum—the time period of the museum, the early 1840s up until about 1850. They were not really interested in the rest of Glen Ellyn history. That came through the years as we became the

¹⁹ “Stacy’s Tavern Museum,” Glen Ellyn Historical Society, <https://www.gehs.org/stacy-s-tavern-museum.html>, accessed October 2019.

repository of more recent artifacts and archives.” The move to the current building from Stacy’s Tavern fifteen to twenty years ago aided their efforts. GEHS board members could not fit the entirety of the historical society’s collections in Stacy’s Tavern, but the new building provided the square footage needed for them to collect a wider array of historical materials.²⁰

Today, GEHS board members and volunteers continue to add materials to the GEHS collection, as well as host programs and other events, including book club meetings and Stacy’s Tavern tours, an annual “Tavern Day,” where attendees can “come see what life was like for the early settlers of Glen Ellyn” and “try [their] hand at 1840’s life,” an annual vintage auto show, and a speaker series featuring first-person interpreters and covering a wide range of historical topics related to local and regional history. They also run the historic marker program started by the society’s founders in 1972, and today more than seventy Glen Ellyn buildings feature GEHS markers.²¹

GEHS leaders face some of the same engagement and relevance issues plaguing the historical societies in Hyde Park and Rogers Park and West Ridge. When she first joined the GEHS almost a decade and a half ago, for example, Carty “started out in [the GEHS] education department, going into schools,” among other things, to introduce students to local history. The GEHS “used to have a very big program...going into the school,” she explained, “...at a period of time when...our local schools did six weeks of local history every year. Now, they do not. They have many other things to do...it seems that if they bring in history, it has to be through literacy, STEM...Science has become such a big thing that history is being pushed aside.”

²⁰ Suzanne Carty, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, October 9, 2019.

²¹ Ibid.; and “Stacy’s Tavern Museum”; and GEHS calendar of events, <https://www.gehs.org/calendar-of-events.html>; and “Glen Ellyn Center for Historical Research,” <https://www.gehs.org/services.html>, both accessed October 2019.

Individual teachers interested in bringing local history into their classrooms can reach out to the GEHS, but many of the teachers, like business owners, no longer live in Glen Ellyn. "...It used to be that the teachers all lived in town and...were sort of interested," Carty said. "They knew what Stacy's Tavern was...at [the] time when the community was restoring the Tavern and they were very involved." This is no longer the case, and the GEHS education program is much less active today than it was a decade ago.²²

In addition, the society's relationship with the village of Glen Ellyn undermines GEHS leadership's ability to demonstrate the society's relevance to Glen Ellyn residents. The village's connection to the historical society began in 1968 when the village board formed a historical commission to manage the Stacy's Tavern restoration, and the historical commission formed a historical society to assist with and accept donations on behalf of the Stacy's project. Though never an official part of Glen Ellyn's municipal structure, the historical society shared several leaders in common with the historic commission at its founding and helped shape the commission and village board's vision for Stacy's Tavern. Today, the connections between historical society and village leadership in Glen Ellyn are much less secure, and the village board's interest in and support for local history and historic preservation ebbs and flows with each administration. The village board continues to support the historical society in other ways—they helped the society recover from flood damage sustained in March 2018, for example—but this support sometimes hampers the society's ability and willingness to take positions for or against development or preservation projects involving the village. Recently, the GEHS board decided to refrain from taking an official position for or against the ongoing residential

²² Carty interview.

development opposed by the “Save Main” group because the village already approved the project. Directly opposing the village could, they feared, frustrate village leaders and pose a threat to the society’s rental agreement. Though the GEHS faces no immediate threats to its survival, its board members, like those at the HPHS and RP/WRHS, worry about their society’s relevance and sustainability.²³

Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society

About a week after I visited with Suzanne Carty at the Glen Ellyn Historical Society, I took the commuter train north from Chicago to Lake Forest to interview two staff members at the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff (HCLFLB), formerly the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society (LFLBHS). One of the first things someone stepping off the train in Lake Forest sees, besides the historic train station, is Market Square, “which...opened to shoppers in April 1916 as the nation’s first artfully designed shopping center.” Market Square evokes an old-world feel, and for good reason: architect Howard Van Doren Shaw “blended Italian Renaissance, Tyrolean, Bavarian, Flemish and English architecture in the three sides of the U, which enclose a grassy square with a fountain in the middle,” and built a large clock tower facing the square from the south (see figure 11). The train station and Market Square anchor the Lake Forest Historic District, established in 1978 and one of “five Local Historic Districts...created to provide a local means of protection for Lake Forest’s historic areas.” Together, these buildings and many others produce a streetscape that makes Lake Forest feel old, established, and European—a sense cultivated in large part by the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society’s earliest members, who helped define what constituted character is Lake Forest and Lake Bluff.

²³ Ibid.

As in Glen Ellyn, the streetscape's historic elements convey to visitors that Lake Forest and Lake Bluff residents care about and pay attention to their local history and historic architecture.²⁴



Figure 11. Market Square clock tower, October 2019.
Source: Author's collection.

Until recently, Lake-Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society board members, volunteers, and staff continued on in very much the same way they had since the late 1970s. After the Historic Sites Committee broke away from the historical society to form the Lake Forest Foundation for Historic Preservation (now the Lake Forest Preservation Foundation) in 1976, the historical society took a decidedly more educational approach. They continued to support LFPF preservation advocacy efforts, but decided to focus more on programs, research, and exhibitions

²⁴ LFLBHS FY2016 Annual Report, <https://www.lflbhistory.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2016%20Annual%20Report.pdf>, Mike Conklin, "Market Square in Lake Forest," *Chicago Tribune*, December 19, 2007, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/chi-chicagodays-marketsquare-story-story.html>, and "Historic Districts and Properties," City of Lake Forest, <https://www.cityoflakeforest.com/city-government/planning/historic-districts-and-properties/>, all accessed October 2019.

than historic preservation. They also continued to include both Lake Forest and Lake Bluff in their institutional mandate despite the founding of a separate Lake Bluff History Museum by Elmer Vliet, a LFLBHS founder, Janet Nelson, and Kathleen O'Hara in 1982. Indeed, how LFLBHS leaders interpreted the society's mission changed very little until about three to four years ago, when the LFLBHS began its transformation into the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff.²⁵

Today, HCLFLB board members, staff, and volunteers continue to collect historic documents and artifacts, research and design exhibits, organize programs and fundraisers, and share stories about local history in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, but their reasons for doing so have changed significantly in recent years. Carol Summerfield, HCLFLB executive director, summarized the shift during our interview when she said, "What we're celebrating is not who we were, but who we are right now." HCLFLB leadership moved away from focusing on people from a century or two in the past, from multi-generational Lake Forest and Lake Bluff families, and instead began "inviting people in...so that the celebration is really that *you* were here, not that your ancestors were here." "Within Lake Forest...it can feel a little like I'm knocking on the door of a club I may or may not be allowed into," explained Summerfield, but this subtle but critical shift in language helps "break that barrier."²⁶

The society's transition to "celebrating...who we are right now" coincided with its move to a new facility in November 2016. The society had been located for close to twenty years in an old city-owned coach house, which they rented for a small annual fee, when society leadership

²⁵ Catherine McKechney, Janet Nelson, Kathleen O'Hara, and anonymous, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, October 3, 2019.

²⁶ Laurie Stein and Carol Summerfield, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, October 16, 2019.

decided the society needed a better space in which to operate. Laurie Stein, HCLFLB curator, recalled, “We had recognized for a long time that that building...it wasn’t great for future growth. We wanted another opportunity elsewhere in Lake Forest, and that was parallel with the fact that the city of Lake Forest wanted us out of there so they could develop that parcel.”

Historical society board members and staff raised \$4 million to purchase and renovate property put up for sale by the Church of Christ Scientist, which established its Lake Forest branch in the 1940s but no longer had the membership numbers needed to sustain a congregation. After an extensive renovation (and requisite fundraisers), the new history center opened to the public in 2018 (see figure 12).²⁷



Figure 12. The new History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff, October 2019.
Source: Author's collection.

²⁷ Stein and Summerfield interview; HCLFLB FY2018 Annual Report, <https://www.lflbhistory.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2018AnnualReport.pdf>, and “Mission and History,” <https://www.lflbhistory.org/about-mission>, both accessed October 2019.

Stein and Summerfield agree that the move to the new building helped facilitate the shift from “sleepy historical society” to “vibrant history center” and from a focus on “who we were” to “who we are right now.” Stein explained, “we have more...[space] for events and exhibits...a place to come to, to see as opposed to just a place of research.” Having a larger, handicapped-accessible space allows them to offer the wider variety of programs and activities needed to demonstrate the history center’s relevance to residents living in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff today. Before the move, according to Summerfield, “The focus had been sort of the history of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff for the sake of telling the story of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. And now what we're really focusing on as "how is that emblematic of a larger story?...And that's one of the underlying filters that we always use on all programming is tie it to a bigger narrative that makes it relevant to everyone who might be interested.” It worked, and now, Summerfield said, “We’re pulling in...people from the community...school groups...we actually pull in people from Chicago now...depending on the topic and from Waukegan. Our radius seems to have expanded from about a 10-mile radius to now like a 40- or 50-mile radius....[For] two programs last year...we actually had people come from Milwaukee.” In the new space, HCLFLB staff have a place where people can congregate comfortably, and their programs feature a more geographically diverse audience than they did when located in the coach house.²⁸

²⁸ HCLFLB FY2018 Annual Report; and Stein and Summerfield interview.

HCLFLB staff also use the new space to create installations designed to make residents and visitors feel included in the local story no matter their background or length of residency in Lake Forest or Lake Bluff. For example, they display stories collected from visitors and online contributors on digital boards installed in their exhibition space. Summerfield explained, "...You have the ability to add your story to our digital board. You can go online, and you can



Figure 13. Sign posted outside HCLFLB recording studio, October 2019.

Source: Author's collection.

tell...whatever narrative you think is relevant to the history of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. So if you want to talk about high school graduation or you want to talk about the store your dad ran, you can do it." Summerfield and Stein hope to increase the number of stories collected from three hundred to eight hundred by fall 2020. They also installed a recording studio in the new facility "so that you can come in and...tell stories in two-minute vignettes," said Summerfield (see figure 13). This is especially critical to their efforts to engage younger people, she explained, because "they're not writing stories and they're certainly not writing letters or diaries...their day to day life is evaporating.

They'll be photographed...but they're not really going to have the narrative that goes with it."

The HCLFLB provides a way for younger people to contribute directly to the local narrative, as well as share their story with HCLFLB visitors. The story program also helps the HCLFLB collect information about present day Lake Forest and Lake Bluff—Summerfield explained, "We're capturing current events so 50 years from now we have a very robust narrative around quotidian life in this community"—and create a space people want to visit more than once.

"Repeat visitors are critical," said Summerfield, and changing and inclusive displays help "create

an environment...that people want to visit over and over and over again.” This dynamism promises visitors and members new, evolving, and relevant historical content from people representing “who we are right now” instead of “who we were.”²⁹

HCLFLB board members and staff also face challenges, but of a different sort than those faced by historical society leadership in Rogers Park and West Ridge, Hyde Park, and Glen Ellyn. The move and transition from historical society to history center brought significant organizational growth, which comes with its own set of questions. Stein explained, “We’ve grown a lot and now that we’re in a stable position going forward, we’re seeing what funding sources are going to propel us to maintain this momentum...The work is not done...I think that’s really going to be our challenge.” They anticipate continued and future growth, which is a far cry from the serious concerns about sustainability facing many of their Chicago-area counterparts. HCLFLB leadership managed to adapt their historical society to meet twenty-first century needs while few other local history groups have yet managed to make the same transition.³⁰

“From a sleepy historical society to a vibrant history center...”³¹

Historical society leadership in Rogers Park and West Ridge, Hyde Park, and Glen Ellyn share similar concerns about their ability to engage people living in their communities. The people I spoke with at each organization discussed their struggles establishing sustained relationships with people who buck the typical historical society member profile, including people from younger generations, black and Latino people, and recent immigrants. They share these problems despite their distance from one another, which suggests that their common

²⁹ Stein and Summerfield interview.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Quote drawn from HCLFLB FY2018 Annual Report.

approach to local history—their commitment to local boundaries and, to quote Carol Summerfield, to celebrating “who we were” in the past—limits their ability to demonstrate broader relevance in their towns and neighborhoods. Board members and staff at each organization have attempted to reinvent their historical societies to some extent, but their success appears to depend on both their willingness and ability to move away from what has traditionally defined local historical societies founded in the decades following World War II.

For Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society leadership, how they approach their commitment to local boundaries limits their ability to build and sustain relationships with new audiences. Historical society founders established their organizations to collect and share history produced within the boundaries of a particular town, city, or neighborhood, and did so for people connected by a shared “love of place.” Indeed, people working with each organization used local history to lay claim to and limit outsider access to their homeplaces. But understanding history in this way, as a series of things that happened within a particular set of official or unofficial municipal boundaries, does not always transcend generational and cultural divides. It worked for historical society founders in Rogers Park and West Ridge, who established their organization to build a new kind of community and identity for white ethnics, but their experience is not universal. Their attempts to collect and share history unfolding within specific geographical boundaries reflects the needs of a particular community at a point in time, and did not (and still does not) resonate in the same way with the area’s black, Latino, and South Asian residents.

Glen Ellyn Historical Society leaders also want to develop stronger, sustainable relationships with Glen Ellyn residents, but changing demographic realities limit their growth potential. For one, the GEHS, like other local historical societies, relies heavily on volunteer labor to run programs and day-to-day operations, but their volunteer labor pool is evaporating

and historical society members as a whole tend to be less involved today than in earlier decades. Suzanne Carty explained, “The membership used to be very involved. I think we have a lot more passive members now who are happy to support us” but who “don’t want to volunteer with us,” and finding volunteers and board members willing to contribute the labor necessary to run the GEHS has become more difficult with each passing year. In addition, Carty said, Glen Ellyn’s population is more transient than in decades past. People continue to join the historical society and renew their memberships because “there are still lots of people that feel a real connection to this community,” but many others do not make Glen Ellyn their permanent home. Carty explained, “People have come in and built the big houses...but as soon as their...kids are through school, they...leave the community.” And the “group that retired and they use to stay in Glen Ellyn,”—a group historical societies could traditionally rely on to join their organizations—are “all going...to Florida, they have a place in Wisconsin, they want to travel.” GEHS leadership struggles to bring in new members more now than they did in the past and the members they do manage to secure do not engage with the historical society in the same ways as in earlier decades. GEHS leadership is not concerned about the historical society’s immediate future, but, like their counterparts in Rogers Park and West Ridge, they worry about the long-term sustainability of their organization.³²

The RP/WRHS, GEHS, and HPHS commitment to local boundaries also undermines their ability to develop sustained relationships with people from younger generations. They want younger people to appreciate local history’s value, join their organizations, and carry on their missions to save and share local history, but younger generations grew up in a much more global

³² Carty interview.

world, one in which the Internet and social media provided instant access to people and information, and do not assign the same values to local boundaries as people from earlier generations. When I asked about difficulties attracting interest from younger Hyde Parkers, HPHS president Michal Safar explained, "...Later generations than ours, and quite frankly we've only got one member under 40 on our board...they see social interaction totally differently than we do. In other words, my parents grew up with this atmosphere and I grew up in this atmosphere where your social time and interactions are spent at organizations like this." Today, she continued, "Younger people...have grown up with social media and tend to look at social engagement on a much larger scale than we do, less of a neighborhood scale and more...'we're going to go on social media and support big causes and get involved in big causes'." They might be interested in history, but how people engage with the past has changed over the past fifty years. Safar, speaking as a retired librarian, mused, "I see it as the growth of information accessibility. It used to be that you had to engage with local people if you wanted to know about local history because you couldn't go on the Internet... We're kind of like a last resort...we aren't the first place that people go and seek" local history information anymore.³³

Of the four historical societies considered in this chapter, the changes recently adopted by the History Center of Lake Forest-Lake Bluff may offer the most promising path for historical society leaders struggling to identify a way forward. The shift away from a focus on "who we were" to "who we are right now" helped HCLFLB leadership break free from some of the major issues facing other historical societies. They hoped to create a more welcoming environment—one without gatekeepers—for anyone living in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, regardless of their

³³ Safar and Jeffries interview.

ancestry. Some long-time members left the HCLFLB during the transition, but their loss reflects HCLFLB leadership's efforts to make the historical society more inclusive. Summerfield explained, "Some of that [membership loss], they're just aging out...But...for folks who found that it was sort of their social gathering...when it was like 10-15 people getting together, they knew who was going to be in the room...that was really comfortable for them. [But] 70 people in the room on a challenging topic [is] less interesting for them." In addition, some of the people joining the HCLFLB today belong to demographics historical societies have, historically, had a difficult time reaching. Summerfield said, "We were able to...pull forward into an entirely new demographic. So instead of it being predominantly seniors, we're seeing more early empty nesters" and "more...people with kids still at home." By shifting their focus away from an exclusive historical society rooted in the past toward an inclusive and dynamic history center, HCLFLB leadership managed to secure a measure of stability that continues to elude their counterparts elsewhere in metropolitan Chicago.³⁴

Like the RP/WRHS, HPHS, and GEHS, the HCLFLB shares historical information collected from within the boundaries of its two communities, but their new focus on "who we are right now" ensures that their commitment to history rooted in place does not hamper their ability to attract new audiences. For one, HCLFLB staff contextualize programs and exhibitions within broader regional and national contexts more intentionally than before, which helps draw people

³⁴ Stein and Summerfield interview. The HCLFLB employs several experienced, professional staff members who provide the direction, fundraising, and labor needed to support the board's vision for the history center. But the HCLFLB's successful transition also depended on the willingness of its board of directors to change their approach to the society's mission. The GEHS employs professional staff as well (though the HCLFLB staff seem to have more hours, benefits, and overall security), and their efforts are certainly integral to the board's ability to keep the society open, but neither the GEHS staff nor the board have made any significant changes to how the society operates. Leadership at HPHS (with no staff) and the RP/WRHS (with one part-time staff member) are more concerned about their immediately future than GEHS board members and staff, and their efforts are infused with an urgency missing at the GEHS.

from and beyond Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. In addition, because their programs and exhibits no longer serve to venerate long-time residents. HCLFLB staff can present historical topics through a more critical lens than in the past while still maintaining the organization's role as local booster. Summerfield explained, "We're still pro-Lake Forest and Lake Bluff but we do not have blinders to the past and we want people to recognize the mistakes of the past so that as we're navigating the present, we're learning from them and we're growing." HCLFLB leadership hopes their new approach fosters an environment in which all people, residents or no, feel welcome and able to contribute to the historical record. Their dramatic increase in visitation and audience turnout for programs suggests they found a sustainable way forward.³⁵

The historical societies in Rogers Park and West Ridge, Hyde Park, Glen Ellyn, and Lake Forest and Lake Bluff shared, and still do, a number of characteristics in common. Residents formed these groups in reaction to effects wrought by significant demographic change in their communities. They each made the intentional decision to adopt and use the local historical society model and each undertook robust agendas that, despite working independently, looked remarkably similar to each other. Historical society founders and members in each place collected historical documents, artifacts, ephemera, and architectural elements salvaged from razed buildings, interviewed old-timers before the moved or passed away, and celebrated historic local architecture and founding families through programs, exhibits, house tours, and historic marker programs. Some of these traditions survived the past fifty years while others faded away,

³⁵ Ibid.

but board members, staff, and volunteers at each organization continue to uphold their original commitment to saving and sharing local history.

Today, these historical societies face many of the same issues, and their shared struggles reveal much about the changing ways people engage with the local past. An inability to form sustained relationships with younger generations has plagued local historical society leadership for decades, as does their struggle to do the same with non-white and working-class audiences. Today, historical society members tend to skew older—empty-nesters and retirees dominate their membership pools—and they tend as a group to be white and more affluent than their broader local populations. Leadership at each historical society has attempted to address their membership and relevance woes by offering a broader array of programs, but real relevance seems to lie in a more radical direction. Each organization considered in this chapter has reimagined, to varying extents, what it means to be a local historical society in the new millennium, but the HCLFLB transition from historical society to history center seems to offer the most promise. Their recent growth stems in part from their decision to celebrate “who we are right now” instead of “who we are,” and move away from a historical society model that placed gatekeepers at the doors to the past.

CONCLUSION

On Sunday, December 30, 2018, Marjorie Fritz-Birch met twenty or so people in front of a historic house in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood to protest Loyola University's decision to demolish the home and an adjacent apartment building (see figure 14). The university owned both, as well as three vacant parcels between them, and had decided earlier that year to build a new student dormitory on all five lots. Fritz-Birch, an Edgewater Historical Society (EHS) board member and member of the Edgewater Environmental Sustainability Project (EESP), joined other representatives from the EHS and EESP to "point out several negative side effects of the project and to demand the community have a seat at the table on such matters." Fritz-Birch explained, "We're trying to stop tear downs for environmental reasons; the demolition will needlessly fill up landfills.... Also, with the demolition...there will be a loss in the neighborhood of affordable places to live. And that building will be taken off the tax rolls and the tax burden will grow for the rest of us." Allen Stryczek, a representative from EESP, added, "...We're objecting to these demolitions on historical, environmental and moral grounds." Loyola ignored requests by Kathy Gemperle, EHS president, and EESP leaders to meet with university president Jo Ann Rooney to "weigh in on what were good ideas [and] what would support the community" and demolished both buildings in early 2019.¹

¹ The Edgewater Historical Society (EHS) was founded in 1988. See "About the Edgewater Historical Society," <http://www.edgewaterhistory.org/ehs/about>. The Edgewater Environmental Sustainability Project was founded in 2010. The people involved "actively partner with our schools, block clubs, faith groups and elected officials to work for a sustainable future for ourselves and succeeding generations." See "History: Edgewater Environmental Sustainability Project," <http://www.sustainedgewater.org/history.html>. Though much of Loyola's Lake Shore Campus is located in Rogers Park, the university also owns educational buildings, residences, and dormitories in adjacent Edgewater, including the two buildings Loyola eventually destroyed. Mitch Dudek, "Protesters say Loyola dorm plan threatens environment, cuts affordable housing," *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 30, 2018,



Figure 14. A demolition crew dismantles the apartment building at 6330 N. Winthrop Avenue (center), Chicago, February 20, 2019. Source: Author's collection.

The decision by Edgewater Historical Society members to protest Loyola's planned demolition was about more than concern for the preservation of two historic structures. To them, and to their allies at EESP, tearing down "viable properties...displace[s] families" and increases property taxes for other residents, threatening affordable living in a gentrifying neighborhood. EHS members used local history to join the debate and then stayed to express concern about how Loyola's decisions contribute to and exacerbate issues facing Edgewater residents today. They failed to sway Loyola's administration in this particular case, but their vocal disappointment

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2018/12/30/18323767/protesters-say-loyola-dorm-plan-threatens-environment-cuts-affordable-housing>; Katie Anthony, "Edgewater Historical Society petitions against new dorm," *Loyola Phoenix*, December 30, 2018; "Save the Buildings," <https://www.thepetitionsite.com/736/660/894/>; and Katherine Rosenberg-Douglas, "Edgewater groups protest Loyola's planned demolition of apartment building, historic home," *Chicago Tribune*, December 30, 2018, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-met-loyola-buildings-demolition-edgewater-protest-20181230-story.html>, all accessed December 2019.

supports a growing chorus of voices calling for Loyola to better manage its relationships with residents and other local stakeholders.²

The Edgewater Historical Society, as well as the many other local historical societies still in existence across the Chicago region, continues the long tradition established by Americans interested in managing their own engagement with the local past. Their members follow the path trod by the people considered in this dissertation, who founded local historical societies to bring local history to conversations about the present and future health of their communities. In Rogers Park, Glen Ellyn, and Cicero, residents formed historical societies to preserve threatened historic buildings and materials, while their counterparts in Hyde Park, Rogers Park, and West Ridge did so in response to concerns about urban renewal, blight, and significant increases in racial and ethnic diversity in their neighborhoods. Lake Forest-Lake Bluff and South Shore Historical Society founders established their organizations to protect what came before as developers and local leaders worked to accommodate the needs of a new generation of residents. Each group used their unique historical authority to protect historic structures, streetscapes, and materials endangered by changes to the demographic status quo, and their ability to claim ownership over local history without contest speaks to the power and privilege they held in their municipalities. These mostly white, middle-class civic leaders, politicians, business owners, academics, and local boosters worked through their historical societies to determine what mattered most in the local past and used those definitions to influence decisions related to local socio-economic change. In each location, society founders and members shared histories meant to make people

² EHS, "Stop the Demolition of 6312/6330 N. Winthrop," <http://www.edgewaterhistory.org/ehs/content/stop-demolition-63126330-n-winthrop>; and Daniel Collazo, "Gentrification is a Problem and Loyola is Only Making It Worse," *Loyola Phoenix*, <http://loyolaphoenix.com/2019/02/gentrification-is-a-problem-and-loyola-is-only-making-it-worse/>, both accessed December 2019.

“feel good about place,” and used local support to embed veneration for what came before in public memory. Their efforts created a new kind of barrier—a heritage barrier—that newcomers and changemakers had to grapple with when proposing changes to the physical and natural environments in these towns and neighborhoods. The heritage barriers historical society founders and members built ultimately protected entrenched local interests and reinforced old power lines, including the long-standing barriers separating poor, black, and immigrant communities from white Chicagoland.³

Today’s historical society members and volunteers carry on many of the same traditions. Now, as in the past, they claim ownership and authority over history bounded by lines dividing neighborhoods and municipalities, collect and share information and stories about local life, people, and properties, create stories meant to instill “love of place” among residents, and bring local history to conversations about the present and future of their homeplaces. But people operating local historical societies today also carry on a problematic tradition rooted in the “love of place” histories they celebrate. These stories generally continue to venerate the roles played by white “pioneers” in local settlement, presenting a picture of the past in which their white and white ethnic ancestors built these places in ways that did not marginalize or exclude people of color. Indeed, their hyper-local approach to the past ignores their relationship to the rest of the metropolis, including how the discriminatory practices designed to confine people of color to urban ghettos and other marginalized metropolitan spaces helped create their mostly white communities in the first place. The histories they write portray a past in which whiteness was

³ Carol Kammen, interviewed by Hope Shannon, audio recording, August 7, 2017.

inevitable, even natural, and ignore the role they played reinforcing racial barriers in one of America's most segregated metropolises.

How people used historical societies to mobilize the past in Hyde Park, Glen Ellyn, South Shore, Lake Forest and Lake Bluff, Rogers Park and West Ridge, and Cicero demonstrates just how powerful a tool local history can be when wielded by influential local leaders. And today, local history groups continue to draw meaning from the past in service to present-day interests. In some cases, local historical society board members, volunteers, and staff are making a genuine effort to push for more critical interpretations of the past and confront forces of oppression. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, in fall 2016, the Cambridge Historical Society (CHS) organized a symposium in which local experts discussed affordable housing and housing inequality in their area. CHS staff used the organization's authority over the local past to convene a conversation in which residents discussed a pressing metropolitan issue with deep historical roots. But many others continue to uphold the same non-critical histories celebrated by their predecessors. Consider, for example, the 2007 decision by Georgetown Historical Society members to install a monument honoring Delaware's Confederate soldiers, or the many local historical society members who continue to celebrate "pioneer" lives and accomplishments across the country, perpetuating the idea that white settlers had a right to indigenous land. We know history is powerful, and we need to pay closer attention to the various ways people employ local history in their homeplaces.⁴

The next decade promises to bring new elements to local history work. Climate change has introduced new challenges to historic preservationists struggling to maintain historic

⁴ Cambridge Historical Society "Housing for All" symposium, <https://history.fas.harvard.edu/event/cambridge-historical-society-housing-all-3-part-symposium>, accessed February 2019; and Sabrina Tavernise, "A Boom in Confederate Monuments, on Private Land," *New York Times*, August 30, 2017, accessed December 2019.

properties threatened by rising sea levels. The fight over what to do with Confederate monuments unfolds in local spaces as often as it does on the national stage and shows no signs of ending any time soon. And preparations for national, state, and local United States sesquicentennial celebrations in 2026 are already underway, and its organizers will likely seek to involve and partner with local historical societies across the country. People will continue to explore local history, and local historical societies will almost certainly continue to play a significant role mediating how people understand and experience local life and change in twenty-first century America.

APPENDIX A
CHICAGO-AREA LOCAL HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

Chicago-area local historical societies

with known founding dates	Date founded
Chicago History Museum (formerly historical society)	1856
Evanston History Center (formerly historical society)	1898
Aurora Historical Society	1906
Kenilworth Historical Society	1922
Morgan Park Historical Society	1923
Du Page County Historical Society	1929
Winnetka Historical Society	1932
Lawndale-Crawford Historical Society	1934
Ravenswood-Lakeview Historical Association	1935
South Shore Historical Society	1935
Englewood Historical Association	1937
Glencoe Historical Society	1937
Historical Society of Woodlawn	1937
Chicago Lawn Historical Society	1938
La Grange Historical Society	1939
Oak Park Historical Society	1941
St. Charles Historical Society	1941
Libertyville-Mundelein Historical Society	1955
Palatine Historical Society	1955
Historical Society of Fort Hill Country	1956
Palos Historical Society	1957

Hammond Historical Society	1959
Batavia Historical Society	1960
Elgin Area Historical Society	1961
Northbrook Historical Society and Museum	1961
Western Springs Historical Society	1961
McHenry County Historical Society and Museum	1963
Dundee TWP Historical Society	1964
Round Lake Area Historical Society	1964
Will County Historical Society	1964
Glenview History Center (formerly historical society)	1965
Sandwich Historical Society	1965
Schaumburg Township Historical Society	1965
Wheeling Historical Society	1965
Highland Park Historical Society	1966
Wilmette Historical Society	1966
Des Plaines Historical Society Museum	1967
Mt Prospect Historical Society	1967
Zion Historical Society	1967
Barrington Area Historical Society	1968
Deerfield Area Historical Society	1968
Downers Grove Historical Society Museum	1968
Glen Ellyn Historical Society	1968
Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest	1968

Manteno Area Historical Society	1968
Rogers Park Historical Society	1968
South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society	1968
Waukegan Historical Society	1968
Naperville Heritage Society	1969
Lemont Area Historical Society	1970
Niles Historical Society-Museum	1971
Park Ridge Historical Society	1971
Ridge Historical Society	1971
South Holland Historical Society	1971
Wood Dale Historical Society	1971
Frankfort Area Historical Society	1972
La Grange Area Historical Society	1972
Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society	1972
Bloomington Historical Society	1973
Hanover Park/Ontarioville Historical Society	1973
Norwood Park Historical Society	1973
Addison Historical Society	1974
Darien Historical Society	1974
Elburn and Countryside Historical Society	1974
Itasca Historical Society and Museum	1974
Long Grove Historical Society	1974
Thornton Historical Society Museum	1974

Tinley Park Historical Society	1974
Clarendon Hills Historical Society	1974
Poplar Creek Historical Society	1975
Calumet City Historical Society	1975
Elk Grove Historical Society	1975
Elmwood Park Historical Society	1975
Hinsdale Historical Society	1975
Historical Society of Elmwood Park	1975
Historical Society of Forest Park	1975
Matteson Historical Society Museum	1975
Oak Brook Historical Society	1975
Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society	1975
Warren Township Historical Society	1975
West Chicago Historical Society	1975
Flagg Creek Heritage Society	1976
Lisle Station Park/Heritage Society	1976
Carol Stream Historical Society	1976
East Side Historical Society	1976
ELA Historical Society	1976
Grayslake Historical Society and Museum	1976
Maywood Historical Society	1976
Morton Grove Historical Society	1976
Oak Lawn Historical Society	1976

Orland Historical Society	1976
Southeast Historical Society	1976
Westmont Historical Society	1976
Wilmington Area Historical Society	1976
Grove Heritage Association	1976
Greater Harvard Area Historical Society	1977
Hyde Park Historical Society	1977
Villa Park Historical Society	1977
South Shore Historical Society	1978
Winfield Historical Society	1978
Homewood Historical Society	1980
Lansing Historical Society and Museum	1980
Robbins Historical Society	1980
Romeoville Area Historical Society	1980
Warrenville Historical Society	1980
Joliet Area Historical Society	1981
Historical Society of Cicero	1983
Lakes Region Historical Society	1983
Irving Park Historical Society	1984
Woodridge Area Historical Society	1984
Fern Dell Historical Association	1984
Park Forest Historical Society	1985
Westchester Historical Society	1985

Manhattan Township Historical Society	1986
New Lenox Historical Society	1987
Edgewater Historical Society	1988
Edgebrook Historical Society	1989
Midlothian Historical Society	1990
Lake in the Hills Historical Society	1994
Big Rock Historical Society	1995
Highwood Historical Society	1995
Worth Historical Society	1995
Cary-Grove Historical Society	1996
Fox Lake - Grant Township Area Historical Society	1997
Bronzeville Historical Society	1999
Sycamore Historical Society	1999
Crystal Lake Historical Society	2000
Lake Villa Historical Society	2003
Historical Society of Island Lake	2006
Oakbrook Terrace Historical Society	2007
Clear-Ridge Historical Society	2011
Round Lake Area Historical Society	2014

Chicago-area local historical societies**without known founding dates****Notes about dates**

West Side Historical Society	1929-30, or late 1950s
Maywood Historical Society	1944 or earlier
River Forest Historical Society	1944 or earlier
Riverside Historical Society	1944 or earlier
Elmhurst Historical Society	1946 or before, or 1971
Northfield Township Historical Society	1960 or 1961
Skokie Historical Society	1962 or 1978
Oak Lawn Historical Society	1965 or before
Harvey Historical Society	1967 or earlier
Lombard Historical Society	1968 or 1970
Wauconda Township Historical Society	1970s
Kendall County Historical Society	1974 or before
Chicago Heights Historical Society	1976 or before
Plainfield Historical Society	1976 or before
Brookfield Historical Society	1977 or before
Peotone Historical Society	1984 or before
Berwyn Historical Society	1985 or before
Dolton Historical Society	1986 or before
Melrose Park Historical Society	1988 or earlier
Bartlett Historical Society Museum	1989 or before
Wheaton Historical Society	1989 or before

Schiller Park Historical Society	1989 or 1990
Sugar Grove Historical Society	1990 or before
Garfield Heritage Society	1991 or before
Beecher Community Historical Society	1992 or before
Bensenville Historical Society	1992 or before
Lockport Area Genealogical and Historical Society	around 2000
North and Pulaski Historical Society	2010 or before
Westside Historical Society	unsure
Blue Island Historical Society	before 1978
Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society	unsure
Braidwood Area Historical Society	unsure
Galewood-Montclare Historical Society	unsure
Leyden Historical Society	unsure
Mt Greenwood Historical Society	unsure
Newport Township Historical Society	unsure
North Riverside Historical Society	unsure
Oak Forest Historical Society	unsure
Palos Heights Historical Society	unsure
Rolling Meadows Historical Society	unsure
Stone Park Historical Association	unsure
Uptown Historical Society	unsure
Churchville Historical Society	unsure
Riverdale Historical Society	unsure

Streamwood Historical Society

unsure

DeKalb County Historical-Genealogical Society

unsure

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Northside Neighborhood History Collection, Douglas Sulzer Branch, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL

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Chicago Sun-Times

Chicago Daily Tribune

Chicago Tribune

Christian Science Monitor

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DNAInfo

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DuPage Historical Review

DuPage Press

Glen Ellyn News

Hyde Park Herald

Lerner Newspapers

Lerner News Star
Loyola Phoenix
Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society
Publisher Daily Journal
Rogers Park-Edgewater News
Rogers Park News
State and Local History News
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