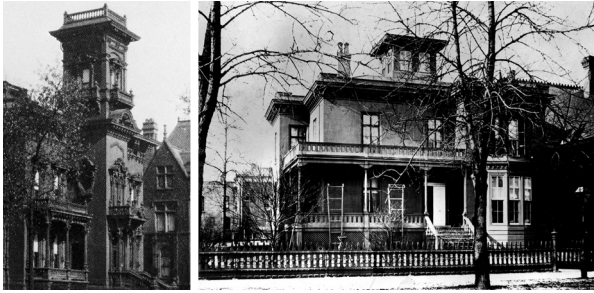


BEGINNINGS

1812–1871



(Left) Thompson House, 1936 South Prairie Avenue
(Right) Staples House, 1702 South Prairie Avenue

The history of this area has been closely linked to that of the City of Chicago for two hundred years. The Battle of Fort Dearborn took place on August 15, 1812 along the Lake Michigan shoreline in this general vicinity. A large cottonwood tree at the northeast corner of Prairie Avenue and 18th Street, dating to the time of the battle, became a traditional symbol of the event. (After the tree died, it was replaced by a bronze statue commissioned by George Pullman in 1893.) In 1834, Elijah D. Harmon purchased a 138-acre tract of land bounded by present day 16th Street, Cermak Road, State Street, and Lake Michigan. Soon after, he sold a 20-acre parcel to Henry B. Clarke who completed his Greek Revival home in 1836 in what is now the 1600 block of Michigan Avenue. Having been moved twice, it survives as Chicago's oldest house. In the early 1850s the area was subdivided and in 1853 the first house on Prairie Avenue was completed for John Staples. Additional houses were built over the next decade with building activity increasing dramatically after the close of the Civil War. In 1870, Daniel Thompson built the first \$100,000 house on the South Side at 1936 S. Prairie Avenue. George Pullman and Marshall Field both acquired property on the street and announced plans to build, firmly establishing Prairie Avenue as Chicago's premier residential street. The Chicago Fire of 1871 bypassed the area, and other business and civic leaders, burned out of their homes, soon purchased lots and built in the neighborhood.

AREA ATTRACTIONS

Glessner House

1800 S. Prairie Avenue
312.326.1480
www.glessnerhouse.org

Clarke House Museum

1827 S. Indiana Avenue
312.744.3316
www.clarkehousemuseum.org

Second Presbyterian Church Friends of Historic Second Church

1936 S. Michigan Avenue
800.657.0687
www.historicsecondchurch.org

Chicago Women's Park and Gardens

1801 S. Indiana Avenue
312.328.0821
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks/Chicago-Womens-Park-and-Gardens/

Chess Records Studio Blues Heaven Foundation

2120 S. Michigan Avenue
312.808.1286
www.bluesheaven.com

Current January 2022

PHOTO CREDITS

All photos from the collection of Glessner House except as follows:

Chicago History Museum—Thompson House, Staples House, Pullman drawing room, Hump Hairpin Mfg. Co.

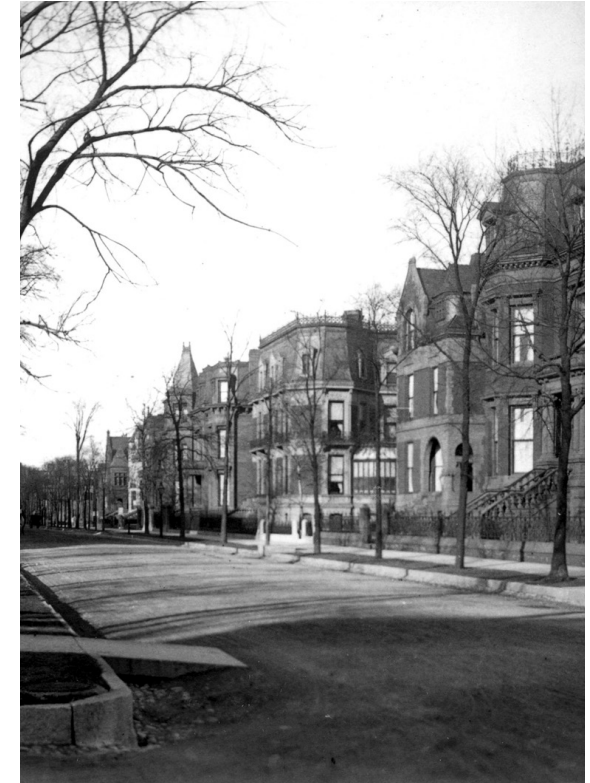
Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library—R.R. Donnelley & Sons under construction

Bob Thall—Clarke House Museum

TEXT: *William Tyre*

PRAIRIE AVENUE

WALKING TOUR GUIDE



GLESSNER HOUSE

PRAIRIE AVENUE | CHICAGO

GLORY DAYS

1872–1904



(Left) Field Mansion, 1905 South Prairie Avenue
(Right) Pullman drawing room, 1729 South Prairie Avenue

When Philip Armour joined Field and Pullman on the street in 1875, Chicago's three wealthiest citizens lived within a four-block stretch of Prairie Avenue. Leading architects were commissioned to design elegant free-standing and attached houses on Prairie and Calumet avenues in a variety of styles. H. H. Richardson of Boston was hired to design the house for John and Frances Glessner, a radical departure from its French-inspired neighbors that received mixed reviews from residents initially, but has come to be recognized as an icon of modern residential design. Richard Morris Hunt of New York designed the Marshall Field house, but most houses were designed by local architects including Cobb & Frost, Treat & Foltz, Solon S. Beman, John Van Osdel, Francis Whitehouse, and William LeBaron Jenney. Burnham & Root received nearly a dozen commissions on the street, beginning with the John Sherman house at 2100 S Prairie Avenue. The neighborhood became the center of the social and cultural life in the city with lavish dinners and balls announced regularly in the society pages. By the time of the Columbian Exposition, Prairie Avenue was touted as one of the must-see sites in Chicago. A guidebook issued by Rand McNally & Co. shortly thereafter proclaimed, "That remarkable street is home to merchants whose business affects every mart on the earth...and who possess wealth that at last aroused the jealousy of New York." By the turn of the century however, forces were in place that sent the neighborhood into a steady decline, and the last new house on the street for nearly a century was built in 1904.

DECLINE

1905–1965



(Left) Hump Hairpin Mfg. Co., 1918 South Prairie Avenue
(Right) R.R. Donnelley & Sons under construction, 1917

The close proximity of the neighborhood to downtown, originally an asset, became a major factor in its decline. Increased noise and pollution from adjacent transportation routes and the southward spread of businesses from the Loop quickly made the area a less desirable place to live. At the same time, new residential areas, including the Gold Coast and suburban communities along the North Shore were luring residents away, especially the children who were raised on the street and now starting families of their own. The houses themselves were considered old-fashioned and outdated and many were soon converted to non-residential uses. By 1910, a medical school and a clinic for the treatment of drug and alcohol addiction operated in former homes. Other houses were adapted for use as offices for the publishing and printing industries or converted to boarding houses. As early as 1905, mansions in the neighborhood were razed and replaced with large commercial buildings, the first two appearing on Indiana Avenue. The R.R. Donnelley & Sons printing plant, designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw, was begun in 1912 on Calumet Avenue. In 1915, the Hump Hairpin Mfg. Co. factory became the first to replace a residence on Prairie Avenue. The automobile industry firmly established itself along Michigan Avenue with over one hundred showrooms, rapidly transforming that residential street into "Motor Row." Only a handful of residents remained by the 1930s with the very last resident, Addie Hibbard Gregory leaving Prairie Avenue in 1944. Eventually, all but eleven houses in the entire area were razed.

REBIRTH

1966–PRESENT



(Left) Clarke House Museum, 1827 South Indiana Avenue
(Right) Chicago Women's Park and Gardens

In 1966, a group of preservationists banded together to purchase the Glessner House, which was threatened with demolition. This effort created a renewed appreciation of the neighborhood and served as an important catalyst in the citywide preservation movement. When three neighboring houses were demolished within the next few years, discussions began to bring formal recognition and protection to the remaining eight houses on Prairie Avenue. In 1973, the City of Chicago announced plans to create a historic district with a restored 1890s streetscape and the addition of the Henry B. Clarke house, which was relocated to the 1800 block of Indiana Avenue. The Prairie Avenue Historic District was designated in 1979 and includes five houses on the 1800 and 1900 blocks of Prairie Avenue, along with three rowhouses on Cullerton Street. Clarke House Museum, individually designated as a landmark, opened in 1982 following an extensive restoration. The opening of the Chicago Women's Park and Gardens in 2000 brought additional cultural offerings to the area. As businesses began moving out in the early 1990s, several loft buildings underwent residential conversion, the first being the Eastman Kodak Co. building at 1721 S. Indiana Avenue in 1993. In 1999, the Hump Hairpin Mfg. Co. building was demolished and replaced with a townhouse development, the first new residential construction on Prairie Avenue in 95 years. The neighborhood, part of the burgeoning South Loop, is now one of the most desirable in the city with its variety of housing including loft conversions, townhomes, and condominiums.

This map lists 27 sites of historical and architectural significance relating to all four periods in the history of the neighborhood. Sites are numbered for a continuous walking tour, but can be visited in any order. The total distance of the suggested route is approximately 1.5 miles. Please remember that many of these sites are privately owned and remain on the public sidewalk while viewing or taking photographs.

- 1 Maxwell-Briscoe Automobile Co. Building**
1737 S Michigan Avenue
1909, Ernest Walker, architect
One of three buildings in the immediate area incorporated into the larger Motor Row Historic District, designated a landmark in 2000.



- 2 B.F. Goodrich Co. Building**
1925 S Michigan Avenue
1911, Christian Eckstorm, architect
The elaborate white terra cotta of this Second Empire-style building makes it among the more decorative buildings in the Motor Row Historic District.



- 3 Second Presbyterian Church**
1936 S Michigan Avenue
1872-1874, James Renwick, architect
1900-1901, Howard Van Doren Shaw, architect
This Gothic-Revival style building received a new Arts and Crafts interior following a devastating fire in 1900 featuring nine Tiffany windows and murals by Frederic Clay Bartlett.



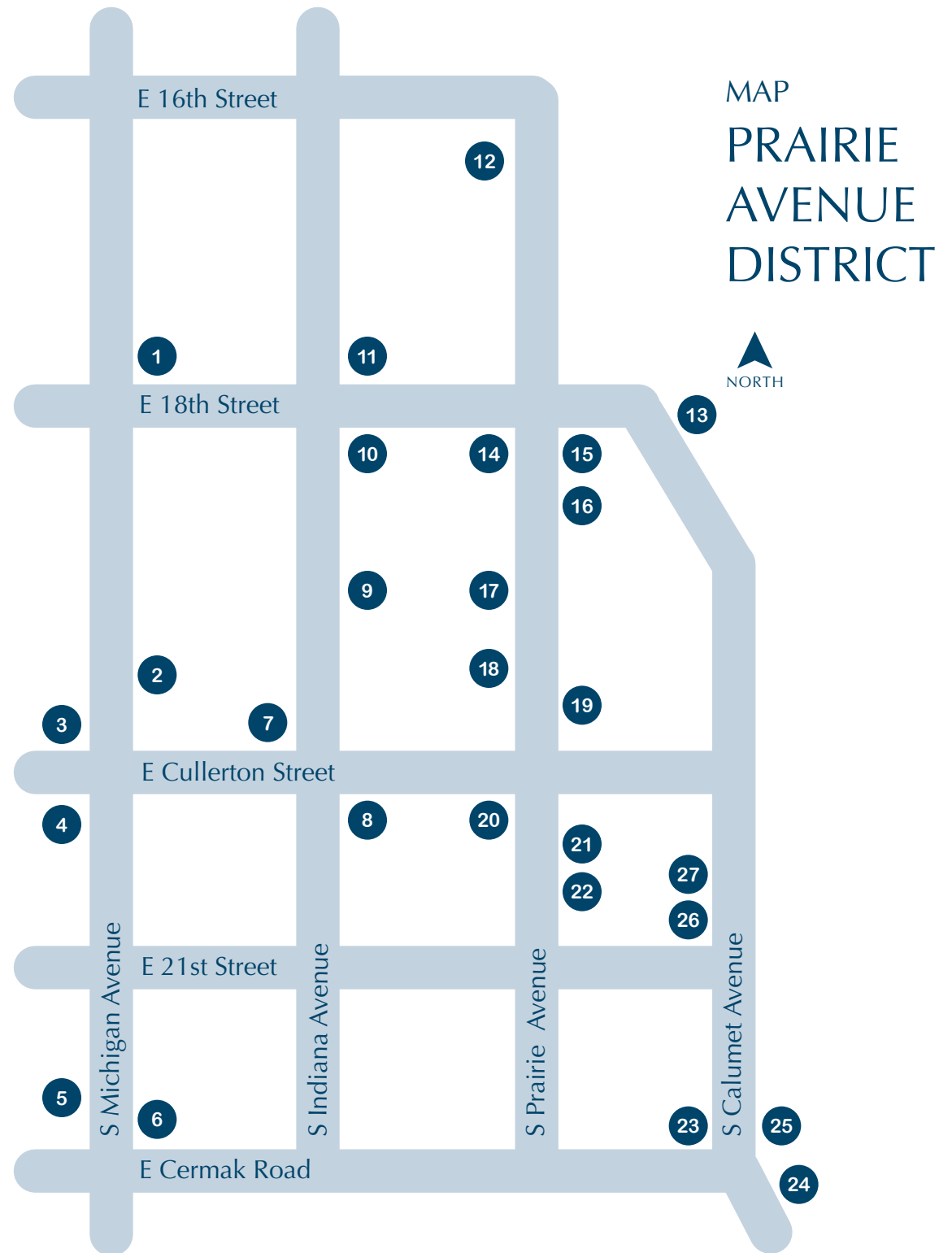
- 4 Locomobile of America Co. Building**
2000 S Michigan Avenue
1909, Jenney, Mundie & Jensen, architects
This building, part of the Motor Row Historic District, proudly displays the name of the company for which it was built and which occupied it until 1929.



- 5 Chess Records Office and Studio**
2120 S Michigan Avenue
1911, Horatio Wilson, architect; 1956-1957, John S. Townsend, Jr. & Jack S. Wiener, architects
The Blues Heaven Foundation now operates this building, home to Chess Records from 1957 to 1967, which recorded some of the era's most important blues music.



- 6 Site of the Lexington Hotel**
2135 S Michigan Avenue
1892, Clinton J. Warren, architect
Demolished in 1995
Originally built to house visitors to the Columbian Exposition, the hotel gained notoriety during the late 1920s when Al Capone operated from a suite of rooms in the building.



7

Western Bank Note Co. Building

1916-1934 S Indiana Avenue
1905, Christian Eckstorm, architect
One of the earliest commercial buildings in the neighborhood housed a firm that produced elaborately engraved stock certificates and other documents.



8

213-217 E Cullerton Street

213: 1891, Thomas & Rapp, architects
215: c. 1870, architect unknown
217: 1892, Thomas & Rapp, architects
The houses at 213 and 217 for Dr. Charles W. Purdy and John M. Clark respectively, replaced houses that would have matched the surviving Italianate-style rowhouse at 215.



9

Clarke House Museum

1827 S Indiana Avenue
1836, architect unknown
Chicago's oldest house, built in the Greek Revival-style, opened as a house museum in 1982 with furnishings provided by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in the State of Illinois.



10

Chicago Women's Park and Gardens Fieldhouse

1801 S Indiana Avenue
1927, Hyland & Corse, architects
This loft building housed the Swiss Products company for many years and later the National Veterans Art Museum before its move to the northwest side in 2012.



11

Eastman Kodak Co. Building

1727 S Indiana Avenue
1905, Hill & Woltersdorf, architects
The motif of a bellows camera survives over the 18th Street entrance to this building, the first loft building in the area to convert to residential use in 1993.



12

Commonwealth Edison Substation

1620 S Prairie Avenue
1925, Hermann V. von Holst, architect
Housing equipment used to convert raw power into DC current for the nearby Metra line, the building features attractive polychrome terra cotta and limestone relief panels.



13

Battle of Fort Dearborn Park

East side of Calumet Avenue at 18th Street
Dedicated August 15, 2009
This park marks the site of a pivotal battle in the War of 1812 with Great Britain in which more than 75 soldiers, civilians, and Native Americans were killed.



14

Glessner House

1800 S Prairie Avenue
1886-1887, H.H. Richardson, architect
This National Historic Landmark contains many of the original furnishings of John and Frances Glessner, proponents of the emerging Arts and Crafts movement in the late 19th century.



15

William W. Kimball House

1801 S Prairie Avenue
1890-1892, Solon S. Beman, architect
This imposing Chateausque-style home with elaborate stone trim and mansard roof was built for the owner of the Kimball Piano & Organ Company.



16

Joseph G. Coleman House

1811 S Prairie Avenue
1886, Cobb & Frost, architects
The brown sandstone residence built for the owner of a hardware company now serves, along with the Kimball House, as the headquarters of the U.S. Soccer Federation.



17

Chicago Women's Park and Gardens

West side, 1800 block Prairie Avenue
Opened 2000
Designed by Chicago landscape architect Mimi McKay, this park was created to pay tribute to important women in the history of Chicago and is home to "Helping Hands" a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois honoring Jane Addams.



18

Elbridge G. Keith House

1900 S Prairie Avenue
1870, John W. Roberts, architect
The last surviving example of the popular Second Empire-style on Prairie Avenue, this was one of several homes on the street occupied by members of the Keith family.



19

Marshall Field Jr. House

1919 S Prairie Avenue
1884, Solon S. Beman, architect
1902, D.H. Burnham & Co., architect
This house was enlarged several times throughout its history and was extensively restored in the early 2000s after sitting largely vacant for twenty-five years.



20

Atwell Printing Co. Building

221 E Cullerton Street
1922, Alfred Alschuler, architect
Terra cotta is used effectively in the design of this building, including the elaborate treatment of the Cullerton entrance and corner medallions featuring an open book.



21

William H. Reid House

2013 S Prairie Avenue
1894, Beers, Clay & Dutton, architects
The only house on Prairie Avenue to remain a single-family home throughout its history features a large Palladian window marking the location of the third-floor ballroom.



22

Harriet F. Rees House

2017 S Prairie Avenue
Original location: 2110 S. Prairie Avenue
1888, Cobb & Frost, architects
This narrow rowhouse features beautifully executed stone detailing and was moved in November 2014 to make way for the new McCormick Place Events Center.



23

American Book Co. Building

320-334 E Cermak Road
1912, N. Max Dunning, architect
Decorative stonework and terra cotta enliven the façade of this building, which was acquired by Donnelley in 1938 as they continued to expand their operations west across Calumet. (See site 25.)



24

Ginn & Co. Building

2203 S Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Original location: 2301 S Prairie Avenue
1907, Howard Van Doren Shaw, architect
Two preservation battles over this building, also known as the Platt Luggage Co. building, resulted in the reconstruction of the façade in its present location.



25

R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co. Building

350 E Cermak Road
1912-1929, Howard Van Doren Shaw, architect
Designed in the Gothic-Revival style, this structure features 500 multi-colored terra cotta shields depicting historic printers' marks in addition to richly carved stone ornament.



26

Columbian Colortype Co. Building

320 E 21st Street
1920, Alfred Alschuler, architect
The last large loft building in the area to convert to residential use, this structure housed the operations of Chess Records as it expanded in the 1960s.



27

The Wheeler Mansion

2020 S Calumet Avenue
1870, Otis L. Wheelock, architect
The only surviving house on Calumet Avenue was saved from demolition in 1997 and was converted to its present use as a boutique hotel, which opened in 1999.

