



Irving Park Walk

Irving Park's development began in 1869 when 4 New Yorkers purchased farmland in what is now the Old Irving Park neighborhood. They originally intended to farm, but after seeing the success of the suburban communities sprouting around them, decided to subdivide the land and create an exclusive settlement 7 miles from the city.

The original name chosen for the new community was "Irvington" after the author Washington Irving. As the name was already taken by another town in Illinois, the name of Irving Park was adopted.

Mansions and grand homes built in a variety of architectural styles gave way to less pretentious homes after the influx of residents after the Chicago Fire. This walk will take you through neighborhoods with homes built in the Victorian, Foursquare, Revival, Craftsman and Bungalow

style. It will take you by the oldest home left in Irving Park, built in 1856 as well as the beautifully restored Carl Schurz high school, known for its prairie architecture.

Irving Park suffered during the Depression and its post WWII prosperity was diminished by the announcement that the Northwest Expressway (now the Kennedy) would cut right through the heart of the community. Today, many young families and professionals call Irving Park home as they discover its rich architectural history and heritage. Preservation efforts are ongoing through home restorations and the efforts of the Irving Park Historical Society.

The Irving Park Community Area consists of 8 neighborhoods. You will walk through 4 of them on this tour: Old Irving Park (the historical core), West Walker, Independence Park and the Villa.

Map numbers correspond to:

1.) 3854 N. Kostner Ave.

Home of John and Clara Merchant. It was approved as a Chicago Landmark in 2008 and much of the content below is from the Landmark Designation Report.

The John and Clara Merchant House, built ca. 1872 from a pattern in Woodward's National Architect (1869), is a handsome Second Empire-style building near the corner of Kostner and Byron avenues. Its large mansard roof and carved flat-lintel window hoods exemplifies the style and visual character of the large single-family homes that dotted the Grayland settlement in the 1860s and 70s.

Clara was the daughter of John Gray, one of the original owners of the farms that were the basis for the Irving Park Neighborhood.

John and Clara Merchant and their seven children lived in the house until about 1879 before moving to Russell, Kansas. They put the house in a trust, but returned in 1886, presumably because Clara's mother (Phoebe Gray) had died. Upon their return, the Merchants began holding religious services in the house, and in 1886 formed the First Baptist Church (later called Irving Park Baptist Church). John Merchant died in the house in 1913 and Clara Merchant, who had later moved from the house, died in 1927.

The Merchant House is an exceptional example of the Second Empire style. It is named after the reign of French emperor Napoleon III (1852-1870), commonly called the "Second Empire," and is based on a nineteenth-century reinterpretation of seventeenth-century French Baroque architecture. In America, the Second Empire style was seen as a prestigious and stylish European architectural style, worthy of emulation by wealthy American clients with a hunger for European chic. Introduced in the U.S. in the 1850s, the style was especially popular for stylish single-family houses in the 1860s and 70s.

2.) 3945 North Tripp Avenue

House of Stephen A. Race, designated a Chicago Landmark in 1988

This home is significant in the history of Chicago and the neighborhood of Irving Park. It is the only remaining home of the original founders of Irving Park – the Race family. The Stephen

A. Race house is a rare Chicago example of a red brick Italianate structure with its architectural integrity for the most part still intact. Originally sited on Irving Park Boulevard, a road that was once an Indian trail in early Illinois, the home's style is especially representative of the type of grand residential dwellings that once lined Irving Park Boulevard in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, when Irving Park was a suburban/country retreat.

When originally built, the home cost \$12,000 – a significant amount of money in 1873. The Charles T. Race House, which no longer exists, was slightly grander in scale and cost \$15,000. Both homes were of the [Italianate](#) style, one of the most popular architectural styles between 1850 and 1880. While the architect's name is unknown to us today, the similarities of the Race homes indicate the brothers used the same architect.

Four stories high, the Stephen A. Race House is composed of red brick contrasted with white limestone and painted wood trim; its style is derived from the villas of [Tuscany](#) in [Northern Italy](#), which are characterized by a symmetrical box shape capped by a flat roof. Large eave brackets dominate the cornice line of Italianate houses. On the Race House, these are over-scaled, elaborately scrolled and arranged in pairs – typical of this era and style.

Particularly arresting is the treatment of the windows on the second level. Tall and thin, with two-over-two lights, they are emphatically framed with semi-circular arches stamped by a prominent limestone [keystone](#).

3.) *Positive Babel Mural at Metra Station Underpass by Tony Passero*

At Irving Park Road at the Metra underpass bounded by the Kennedy Expressway exit and Keeler on the north wall and the Kennedy Expressway entrance and Avondale on the south wall. Created for the Old Irving Park Association, the base concept of the Positive Babel mural is the world lives, works and plays in Old Irving Park. There are 70 landmarks and iconic structures from various nations throughout the world represented in the mural. The blue in the sky of the mural was selected to represent the color of the Chicago flag.

4.) 4053 N. Keeler Ave.

On the SE corner of N. Keeler Ave. and W. Belle Plaine now stands the Fullness Presbyterian Church. Originally the Dutch Reformed Church, it was constructed in 1872 and was the only house of worship for 13 years. The building was completely remodeled in 1908 in a combination of Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts design by noted architect Elmer C. Jensen. Elmer C. Jensen worked as an architect in [Chicago](#) for 70 years, earning him the title of “The Dean of Chicago Architects.” Jensen designed his own residence at 4041 N. Lowell in the Colonial Revival style, the most notable feature being the massive portico featuring four 18 foot high concrete over brick columns. (The home is noted on the map but not a numbered stop on this tour.)

5.) West Walker Neighborhood

You will pass through the corner of this neighborhood, characterized by large single family homes in late Victorian, Foursquare and Revival styles.

6.) The Independence Park Neighborhood and Park

The Independence Park Neighborhood was established in the 1800s, and it retains the vintage character of oversize lots, mature trees and generously sized homes in a variety of period styles. Independence Park itself was established in 1914. The attractive brick fieldhouse was designed by Hatzfeld and Knox. Independence Park was once considered the best landscaped park in the city, but it is now mostly a bland assortment of ball fields and playgrounds. The park was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

7.) Gross Boulevard addition

The area south of Irving Park Road was developed by Samuel Gross and was known as "Gross Boulevard addition to Irving Park". The housing stock is similar to that of West Walker.

8.) Mural under the RR overpass at Pulaski

This mural depicts the advertising that the original Irving Park Developers used to entice people to move there.

9.) The Villa

This is the highlight of the tour for me! This cute little neighborhood was dubbed the "Polish Kenilworth" by Mike Royko, a famous Chicago newspaper columnist. It is a Chicago Historical Landmark District. Developed in the early 1900s, its hallmark characteristics are the craftsman and bungalow style houses on boulevard style streets with landscaped medians. Stone planters mark the area.

Read more about this district in the resource links. Or click here : ["Getting to know Chicago's Smallest Neighborhood: The Villa"](#)

10.) Smoque Barbecue 3800 N. Pulaski

Smoque is at the corner of Grace and Pulaski. It is a very famous barbecue place with many awards and write ups. If you are really determined to eat here, you will have to be very patient. The line sometimes wraps around the building.

11.) Schurz High School 3601 N. Milwaukee Ave.

The school is named after German–American Carl Schurz, a statesman, soldier, and advocate of democracy in Germany. The school building, which represents a combination of the Chicago and Prairie schools of architecture, was designed in 1910 by Dwight H. Perkins and designated a Chicago Landmark on December 7, 1979. It is considered one of "150 great places in Illinois" by

the American Institute of Architects. The AIA has described the school as Perkins's masterpiece, "an important example of early-twentieth century architecture, utilizing elements of both the Chicago and Prairie schools. "

12.) 4362 W. Grace John Gray's First House

Gray's first home built in 1856 at 4362 W. Grace survives today in a remarkable state of preservation and is the oldest house in Irving Park. John Gray was the owner of the farm which was bought by the 4 New York men to develop what is now known as Irving Park.