

## Devon Avenue Commercial District



2727 W. Devon, 1927

### Overview:

Devon Avenue on Chicago's far north side is known throughout the Midwest and even internationally as a destination for a wide variety of Indian, Pakistani and other South Asian restaurants and shops. This international marketplace highlights the great diversity of Chicago and attracts thousands of visitors to our city.

First developed in the years following World War I, Devon Avenue exhibits a fine collection of modest early-1920s brick buildings, elaborate late-20s era terra cotta commercial flats, and art deco-influenced structures from the early-1930s. While the vibrant cultural melting pot of Devon Avenue flourishes, its architectural heritage is threatened by neglect, indifference and the city's lack of enforcement of zoning and building codes. Current plans for new development could irreparably harm the character and quality of this important street and its surrounding neighborhood.

### History:

Originally known for its farms and greenhouses, North Town, as it was then called, began to attract residential and commercial development in the early 1920s. Developer Henry B. Rance opened the area's first real estate office in a frame shack at the corner of Devon and Western Avenues.

**Address: 2230-2800 West Devon**

**Architectural Style: Various**

**Date: 1920s, 1930s**

## Chicago 7: Devon Avenue Continued:

This temporary office was soon followed by a grand edifice of white terra cotta with Gothic detailing designed by William Presto. The 1920s was a period of rapid development with many fine buildings in a variety of styles by architects such as William Keller, A.E. Norman, Oldefest & Williams, Johnson & Anderson, Dewey & Pavlovich, Minkus & Gross and Adolf Woerner. Among the best are half a dozen two-story terra cotta commercial buildings spread across the length of Devon Avenue, designed by Oldefest & Williams. Adolf Woerner's North Town Post Office and Apartments at 2626 W. Devon is one of Devon's jewels with its yellow brick, red Spanish tile and recessed balconies. Diagonally across the street at 2635 W. Devon, Minkus & Gross transformed a prototypical corner commercial and apartment building with their lively geometric detailing.

### Threat:

The importance of Devon Avenue's architectural heritage has yet to be recognized or acknowledged. There are those who would like to see a "new face" for Devon that does not include its historic architecture. Recent plans for new development are entirely out of character with the scale and texture of this pedestrian retail street. Building maintenance and public infrastructure have also been neglected, allowing "obsolescence" to become an excuse to abandon the past.

### Recommendation:

If Devon Avenue is to remain the vibrant center of a culturally diverse community, it must retain existing businesses and attract new ones. Devon's architectural heritage is one of its great assets and the foundation of its pedestrian character. We encourage the City of Chicago to assist in the preservation and rehabilitation of Devon Avenue's historic architecture through landmarking individual buildings, providing small business improvement loans to encourage rehabilitation, investment in infrastructure and streetscape programs, and enforcement of zoning and building regulations. If Devon is to be a street for the future, it must embrace its past.



2315-2325 W. Devon, 1923-1931



Proposed new development at 2552 W. Devon

Photos of Devon Avenue: Maribeth Brewer