

Wicker Park Commercial District



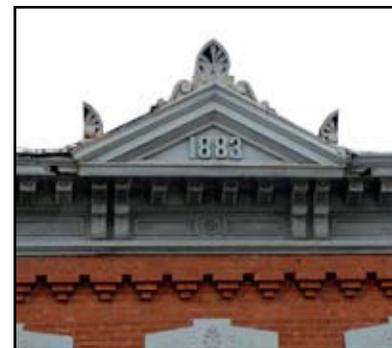
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Address: Milwaukee Avenue, from the Division/Ashland intersection through the Damen intersection

Date: 1880's to 1930's

CHRS Rating: Approximately 50 structures with Orange rating or other

National Register: Partially a National Historic District



Overview:

Once a diagonal Indian path and early toll road, this vibrant, multi-faceted stretch of Milwaukee Avenue is one of the precious few Chicago neighborhood commercial districts that remains largely intact. It encompasses 50 structures that have earned a CHRS (Chicago Historic Resources Survey) rating, including multiple Orange-rated buildings.

History:

Known as "the immigrants' path to prosperity," Milwaukee Ave was a major contributor to the establishment and evolution of Chicago. Initially, Native Americans and early settlers traveled down the road into the heart of the city to sell their goods and services. As the city expanded, people moved up the Avenue as they climbed the economic ladder.

Reflecting the Wicker Park District's heritage of German and Norwegian settlers and the influences of the Jews and Poles that followed, the street is a rich mosaic of structures that served the ever-changing needs of the decades beginning in the mid 1800s. Businesses may have changed from cloak tailors to boutiques and from feed stores to neighborhood eateries and specialty shops, but it has remained the commercial heart of Wicker Park.

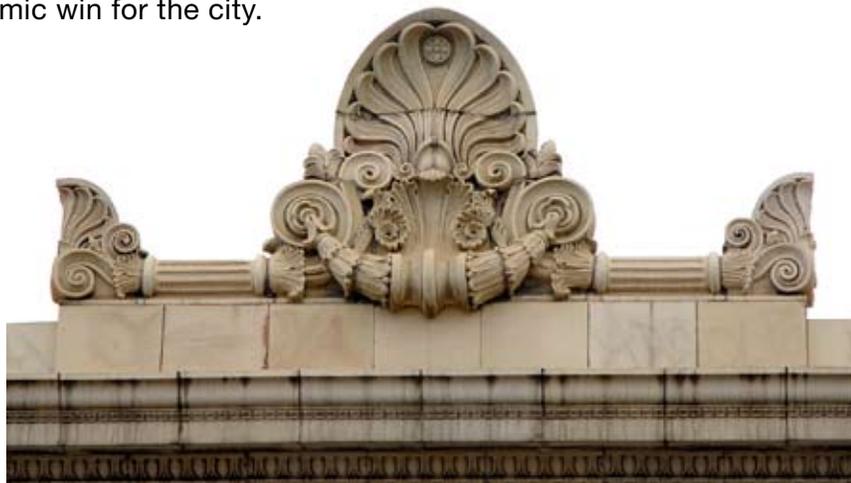
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Threat:

With only its residential sections established as a Chicago Landmark District in 1991, the entire northeast edge of the Wicker Park District runs parallel and adjacent to Milwaukee Avenue. Although part of the Milwaukee commercial strip was placed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1979, all of it remains unprotected and vulnerable to teardowns, which have already begun.

Recommendation:

The health and well-being of the entire District is affected by this strip; it is vital that the substantial number of remaining historic structures be protected. They are what add vibrancy to the community, housing the necessities and luxuries of life desired by this economically and culturally diverse area. Therefore, Preservation Chicago recommends that Milwaukee Avenue from the intersection at Division and Ashland through the intersection at Damen and North be given Chicago Landmark status. By doing so, the strip will continue to provide a unique experience that mixes historical European influence with the contemporary. As a Chicago landmark commercial district, Milwaukee Avenue can become a destination for Chicagoans and visitors – and another economic win for the city.



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