Community Area #5
North Center

Population: 33,010
Number of Structures: 7,084
Avg. Date of Construction: 1909

Significant Structures: 80

Source: 1990 Census, Harris File, CHRS

(Dots show approximate, rather than specific, locations of significant structures.)
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North Center, as its name suggests, lies in the center of Chicago's North Side. Its most prominent natural feature is the North Branch of the Chicago River, which forms its western boundary.

In the 1850s, William B. Ogden, the first mayor of Chicago, sold 80 acres in this area to Englishman John Turner, an early settler. In 1854, work began on the Chicago and North Western Railway. Its completion in 1873 spurred the development of truck farming throughout the northern section of the community area, including celery production.

The area's southern section contained commercial facilities, including clay pits for the manufacturing of brick (along Belmont Avenue) and a livestock market near Damen and Diversey avenues. Other industries during the 19th century included a harvester works, a terra cotta production plant, an iron works, a slaughter house, and a sausage factory. Little remains of these early industries.

Residential settlement was sluggish until the 1870s, due in large part to poor transportation links with Chicago. For many years, Little Fort Road (now Lincoln Avenue) was the only major route through the area. However, annexation to Chicago in 1899 encouraged better public transportation, and streetcars began to ply the area's streets in the 1890s. The Lincoln Avenue streetcar ran as far north as Irving Park Road by 1894, and similar lines were in place along Irving Park, Roscoe, and Western by 1896. Prior to annexation, most residents lived in the
southeastern portion of the community, but, by 1900, housing had expanded to the west and north, along the new streetcar lines. A frame commercial/residential building, built in 1895, remains at 1840 W. Belmont.

Also in the 1890s, the central business district of the community—the six-corner intersection of Damen, Lincoln, and Irving Park—came of age. The Queen Anne-style commercial buildings at 1956 W. Irving Park were erected in 1895. Other improvements included the elevation of the Chicago and North Western railroad tracks in the 1890s and the construction of the Ravenswood (now the CTA Brown) elevated line in 1907. Light manufacturing was located along the Chicago River and on Diversey, Irving Park, Ravenswood, and Western.

Several notable buildings were constructed in the decade preceding World War I. Dwight H. Perkins designed the Hamlin Park Field House (c. 1910) at 2039 W. Barry. St. Benedict's Church (1917), 2201 W. Irving Park, features a Romanesque facade with northern Italian details, and a commercial building at 3936 N. Lincoln has handsome Classical Revival details, executed in terra cotta.

An impetus to large-scale development throughout the early-20th century was the filling in and development of the area's clay pits. One of these sites became Riverview, an amusement park at Belmont and Western avenues that opened in 1903, and closed in 1967. (The site is now occupied by several uses, including a shopping center.)

Another landfill, at Addison and Western avenues, became the Mid-City Golf Links from 1923 until 1930, when it was replaced by Lane Technical High School, a Tudor Revival-style building. Another important group of buildings built on landfill in the area was the Julia C. Lathrop Homes (1938), a Public Works Administration project at Diversey and Damen avenues that was one of the city's earliest government-built public housing complexes.

The focus of the Chicago Historic Resources Survey was on buildings erected prior to 1940. Buildings and developments erected after that date generally are not included in the inventory.