



Lower River North Historic District

Address: Area bounded roughly by Carroll Avenue to the south, Grand Avenue to the north, Franklin Street to the west, and Wabash Avenue to the east (please refer to enclosed map).

Date: 1872-1930

Architect: Various

Style: Various Popular Commercial Building Types

CHRS

Rating: 37 Orange, 6 Green

Threat: Literally surrounded by high-rise development on all sides, the fate of one of Chicago's most compelling commercial districts is presently undecided. The River North Historic District encompasses some of Chicago's oldest commercial buildings, as well as many other small- or medium-scale turn-of-the-century commercial buildings designed by many noteworthy architects.

Intact streets lined with smaller commercial buildings characterize this district. The narrow, Victorian buildings that define many of the area's streetscapes give the area its unique character, but they also make it particularly vulnerable to various forms of decay. Several of these smaller buildings have been demolished in recent years for parking lots, while others are being targeted by developers as a means to assemble large parcels for large-scale development. As each of these streetscapes relies on the coherence of a solid line of buildings, each successive loss greatly diminishes the character of the entire district.

Fulfillment of Landmark Criteria:

The River North Historic District meets a required number of the criteria established by the Chicago Landmarks Commission for preliminary landmark status.

Integrity: The district, while interrupted on occasion by an abundance of surface parking and buildings that do not respect the scale or nature of the district, maintains a striking degree of integrity given its age and location. In fact, the presence of surface parking lots within the district presents a unique opportunity to grow the district, while ensuring the continued coherence of the area. Landmarking of these lots at this present time would allow for this.

Individually, most of the structures contained within the district express a high degree of architectural integrity and are nearly unaltered. Modifications to certain buildings are greater than others, including the absence of cornices and unsympathetically modified storefronts. However, given the age of the district, the degree of integrity far exceeds most other areas of this vintage within Chicago.

- 1. Significant Architect:** Many of Chicago's most cherished architects are represented within this district, including W. W. Boyington, Burling & Adler, Holabird & Roche, Huehl & Schmid, Alfred S. Alschuler, and Schmidt, Garden & Martin.
- 2. Significant Architecture:** The buildings within this district comprise the most clear and concise demonstration of commercial architecture's development in Chicago, from the year immediately after the Great Chicago Fire up to the years immediately before the Depression. As roughly 80 percent of the district is made up of pre-1900 buildings, the district also offers an unparalleled view into Victorian Chicago's commercial and industrial character and growth.
- 3. Critical Part of City's Heritage:** Lower River North illustrates the crucial development of Chicago commerce and industry during its significant stages of growth, as reflected by its various building types, styles and sizes.
- 4. Distinct Theme as a District:** In no other part of Chicago can one examine the growth of medium-sized commercial architecture during the critical periods immediately following the Chicago Fire.