



The former Washburne Trade School sits vacant and decaying at the southwest corner of 31st and Kedzie. The City-owned complex comprises a classic Chicago-School Factory, as well as a fascinating structure that combines Art Moderne and Prairie-School design (foreground).

Great Chicago Factories and Warehouses

- Address:** Citywide
- Date:** c. 1890-1930
- Architect:** Various, including many of Chicago's most noteworthy architects
- Style:** Chicago School, with detailing in various period styles
- CHRS Rating:** Many Orange, Yellow, Green

Overview:

Many Chicagoans are well aware of the rich past of the Chicago School of architecture, especially our glorious early skyscrapers, but far fewer are familiar with the history or importance of the skyscraper's industrial cousins. Although largely unheralded by the history books, the Chicago School's reach did not stop with downtown high-rises: Throughout the city, the same revolutionary principles of design can be found in our Great Factories and Warehouses.

While these massive industrial buildings may lack the awe-inspiring heights of downtown towers, they are no less important to our city's history, to the fabric of our neighborhoods, or to Chicago's visual richness. Unfortunately, however, many of these iconic buildings are now at risk.

As the industrial powerhouse of the nation, Chicago companies demanded newer, state-of-the-art buildings that would make their establishments run efficiently and in a manner hospitable to their workers. Chicago architects brought the design of the modern warehouse to the level of an art, and in the process, developed a new architectural archetype that is indigenous and largely unique to the city.



This Great Chicago Warehouse at 1730 South Western Avenue was demolished in 2004.

After the initial development of the skyscraper, Chicago architects took the same architectural concepts of structural expression and honesty found downtown and applied them to industrial buildings citywide. The internal structural frame of these buildings allowed large, free expanses to form on their interiors, while large window openings allowed the maximum amount of natural light to penetrate deep within. Tall towers began to rise above the roofline, disguising unsightly water tanks, and also serving as powerful beacons that established the buildings – often the largest employers in a given area – as focal points of the neighborhoods. The exteriors, almost without exception, expressed the powerful rhythm of the internal structure.

Architects applied many varieties of ornamentation and style to the prototypical Great Chicago Warehouse, ranging the spectrum from the native Prairie School of design, to the Gothic Revival prevalent in the 1920s. However, it may be those warehouses executed in the pure Chicago School mode that are today most prized: Unleashed from commercial owners' profit-focused demands for ornamentation, certain architects took this opportunity to reduce the structure and its design to the barest essentials. Many noted architectural scholars point to these very buildings as the rightful ancestors of the refined, modern International Style of architecture championed much later by Mies van der Rohe and his peers.

Threat:

Today the Great Chicago Factories and Warehouses are an endangered species. Coveted (continues, opposite page...)

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Threat:
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by developers for their land underneath in established, inner-city neighborhoods, intense pressure exists to reduce these neighborhood icons to rubble, despite the many obvious reuse options that exist. The past ten years have witnessed the destruction of an incredible number of these structures, as developers have opted to construct mundane strip malls and "big box" retail, residential subdivisions, and industrial complexes. In the process, some of the most easily identifiable presences in Chicago's neighborhoods have been lost.

What is more, these structures present an unusual and profound opportunity for Chicago, if retained and reused. Due to their massive scale, tremendous structural strength, ample windows, and high ceilings, it is possible to convert them for any number of modern uses. The Great Chicago Warehouses and Factories should be looked upon by the development community and the City as tremendous assets and opportunities, not as obsolete liabilities. In the process of preserving these buildings, we will not only honor our unique role as the Industrial Capital of America, but retain a unique feature of our neighborhoods that cannot be replicated elsewhere.



The **Bunte Brothers Candy Factory** at 3301 West Franklin Boulevard, Garfield Park, 1919. Currently used as the Westinghouse High School, the building is scheduled to be demolished when the new school is completed nearby. The building was designed by the firm of Schmidt, Garden, and Martin, one of the leading firms of the Prairie School of Architecture.



The **Central Manufacturing District Extension** on Pershing Road, between Paulina Street and Western Avenue. The long row of warehouses, designed by architect Samuel Scott Joy from 1912-1922, is one of the Midwest's most impressive industrial complexes. As recently as 2000, a developer expressed interest in demolishing the buildings for a modern industrial park. Now, one of the buildings is being converted for market-rate condominiums, but balconies and other insensitive alterations could ruin the uniformity and elegance of the complex.



The **Florsheim Shoe Company**, 3985 West Belmont Avenue. Designed in 1924 by celebrated architect Alfred S. Alschuler, the building bears an unmistakable resemblance to the refined concrete and glass highrises of the International Style. The building's pronounced piers, large expanses of glass, exposed concrete, minimal ornamentation, and reentrant corners make this one of the finest Chicago School warehouses ever built. Community residents have been fighting a plan by Dubin Residential to demolish this complex of buildings. While the developer has agreed to retain parts of the complex, others are slated to be razed for strip malls and housing.

Reuse:

The numerous **Reuse Possibilities** include:

- Residential conversion (lofts, senior housing, affordable housing, dormitories, etc.)
- Art studios
- Office space for creative and other professional companies
- "Flex" (commercial / light industrial) space
- Storage facilities
- Big-box or smaller services retail (possibly with inside parking)
- Live / work space
- Mixed used (with possible civic components such as libraries, etc.)

Nearly all of the building types above are being newly constructed throughout Chicago, but rarely are existing buildings considered to serve these same purposes.

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This Orange-rated Great Chicago Warehouse, formerly at 4100 South Pulaski, was demolished in mid-2003. It was one of only 6 Orange-rated buildings in the Archer Heights community. The site has been partially redeveloped with a Citgo Gas Station, and a strip mall is planned to occupy the other half of the site in the future. The enormous ceiling heights of this building, visible in the photo, would have accommodated many warehousing and retail operations.



Also a design of Alfred Alschuler, the former **E. J. Brach and Sons Candy Company** building at 401 N. Kilpatrick Street (1924) has recently been shuttered. Although the new owners have expressed interest in reusing the sprawling complex for office space, doubts remain concerning the future of this building, the oldest at the site.



The main façade of the **Washburne Trade School**, 3100 South Kedzie Av. The building's combination of Art Moderne, Art Deco, and Prairie elements is unique. It was designed in 1935 by S. D. Gratias, and has an Orange rating.

This delightful structure could be a major community anchor and economic engine in the Little Village community, if it is reused.