

# **Chicago's Southeast Side Cultural Institutions: A Community of Churches**

by

**The Museology Class  
of  
Washington High School**



**Post Card Views of the Southeast Side**

In these two postcards from South Chicago and from Hegewisch, the importance of churches as neighborhood institutions is obvious. The South Chicago post card shows (from top left clockwise): Swedish Lutheran Church, St. Joseph's Rectory, the Jewish Synagogue, St. Joseph's Church, St. Michael's Church, Immaculate Conception Church, and the 1st Congregational Church. The Hegewisch post card shows: St. Columba Church (top right), Hegewisch Methodist Church (bottom right), and St. Florian Church (bottom left). Neighborhood post cards were very common in the early twentieth century and provide an interesting view of what area neighborhoods looked like at that time. The Southeast Historical Museum has a number of very interesting post card views of Chicago's Southeast Side.

#### Acknowledgments

This booklet has been produced by the Museology Class of Washington High School. The Museology Program has been in operation at the Southeast Historical Museum since 1990 and has been engaged in numerous project based activities since its inception. Funding for this booklet was generously provided by the Oppenheimer Family Foundation and the Disney Creative Classroom Grant. Many have helped in the development of this booklet. We would like to thank the Southeast Historical Museum for the use of their facilities and for the pictures which they furnished. Special thanks to Ora Coon who assists Museology students. Thanks also to the local residents and clergy who contributed their memories, materials, and suggestions. Thanks to Joseph Mulac, local artist, for the use of his paintings of area churches which were used on the cover of this booklet. How many of these churches can you identify? Thanks especially to the students of Washington High School in the Museology Program who assisted in this project.

**Rod Sellers - Museology Coordinator**

# **Chicago's Southeast Side**

## **Cultural Institutions: A Community of Churches**

The theme of this project is to explore the methods by which various ethnic groups transmit their culture and traditions to succeeding generations. The project developed from participation of the Southeast Historical Museum in the Cultural Connections Program sponsored by the Field Museum of Chicago. The program is a partnership of museums and cultural centers located in and around Chicago. The purpose of the Cultural Connections Program is to explore the rich cultural diversity which exists in Chicago and, while exploring the cultural differences among various groups, to look at the "connections" between groups. How do various ethnic groups respond to common concerns? In many situations, despite large differences of language, tradition, history, and customs there are similarities in the ways that these groups respond to problems and often, as many similarities among groups as differences. The theme of the Cultural Connections Program is "common concerns, different responses."

This is the case on Chicago's Southeast Side. Numerous ethnic and religious groups were drawn to the region by the jobs offered by heavy industry after the Civil War. Beginning with the opening of the Joseph H. Brown Steel Mill in 1875, wave after wave of various ethnic groups came to the area. Most did not speak the language and most were not welcomed with open arms. How did they cope? How did they maintain their customs and traditions while simultaneously adapting to life in their new surroundings? Ethnic groups in Chicago have established institutions such as churches, schools, museums, cultural centers, historical societies, athletic teams, and social clubs to maintain, share, and transmit their cultural heritage and reinforce community ties. This booklet focuses on the cultural institutions in the neighborhoods of Chicago's Southeast Side - South Chicago, South Deering, the East Side, and Hegewisch. It emphasizes the many churches founded by the various ethnic groups which settled there. The phrase "Smokestacks and Steeples" was often used to describe the neighborhood skyline. Many of the smokestacks have disappeared in the post industrial era but the steeples remain. They may not be occupied by the same groups that built the church but the steeples remain.

As the various groups arrived they brought their culture, customs, and churches. Each succeeding group added to the rich mosaic of multi-ethnic diversity which existed in the area. The groups did not always get along with one another but they learned to live and work together making this one of the most interesting and diverse communities in Chicago.

The area was originally settled by Irish, Germans, Swedes and other northern and western Europeans. During the golden era of immigration to the United States, waves of Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Croatians, Slovenians, Italians, Greeks, Serbians and others came to the region. In the twentieth century, when European immigration was limited by quota laws, Mexicans and African Americans came to the area to fill the jobs in the mills. In more recent years Puerto Ricans, Arabs, Ethiopians, Haitians, and others have arrived.

The churches of the Southeast Side tell the story of ethnic succession which occurred in the community. The church was the most important institution in maintaining the language and cultural traditions of the "old country" in a foreign land. Immigrants, who may have had difficulty making ends meet, donated time and money and built churches which stand as monuments to their devotion and spirit. The churches were symbols of ethnic and religious pride and were usually the most impressive structures in the neighborhoods. They were more than houses of worship. They were a link to the old country and centers of social activities and community life. Most had schools or Sunday schools where the traditions and language of their homeland were taught and maintained. The churches show where the groups settled in the community and the changes which have occurred in the community as it has changed.

Yet ethnic groups did ultimately assimilate or adapt to the new land. Some did it more quickly and more completely than others. Other groups tried to maintain the traditions of the country of their ancestors. But change did occur and this booklet would be remiss if it did not mention, however briefly, those places and institutions in the new land which created changes in many ethnic groups. Multiple ethnic groups mixed and mingled in the workplace, in unions, in the military, and in other groups and organizations which did not focus on a single ethnicity.

### **The Early Years 1850 - 1880**

South Chicago, the oldest of the four Southeast Chicago communities dates its origins to 1836. Speculators bought land in anticipation of a canal which would connect the Calumet River and the Mississippi River system. The canal, the Cal sag Channel, was not built until the twentieth century. As a result early development slowed until the coming of the steel industry to the area after the Civil War. The earliest ethnic groups to come to the Southeast Side were English, Irish, German, and Swedish. This reflects the common immigration patterns in American history at this time. Before the Civil War the area grew slowly and the first church was not founded until 1857. This first area church was St. Patrick's Catholic Church.



**Saint Patrick's Church**



**Swedish Methodist Church**



**Immanuel Lutheran Church**

#### **Saint Patrick's Church**

Saint Patrick's church, the oldest church on the Southeast Side, was founded in 1857 by Irish Catholics as an outmission of St. James church then located at 27th and Prairie Avenue in Chicago. The parish was a territorial Catholic parish (see inside back cover). The original church was located at what is now 93rd and South Chicago Avenue, across the street from the current South Chicago Fire Station. The church remained at that location until 1878. It then moved to 95th and Commercial Avenue. In 1880 Father Martin van de Lahr became the first appointed pastor. He was to lead the parish through many improvements. A school opened in 1883 with over two hundred students. A rectory and convent was built soon thereafter. In 1889 St. Patrick's opened the first Catholic high school in Chicago. In May 1902 the combination church-school building, shown above, was destroyed by fire. A new church-school building of brick and steel construction, built on a stone foundation, opened in 1903. The church had a seating capacity of nine hundred and the school had fourteen classrooms, laboratory, music room and library. In the early 1900's the school had an enrollment of 642 in the grammar school, 105 in the high school, and 27 in the commercial department. The high school closed in 1924. The elementary school closed in 1968 and the parish closed as well. The building is currently owned by a Baptist church.

#### **Swedish Methodist Church**

The original Swedish Methodist Church was erected in 1882 on the southeast corner of Ninety-first Street and Exchange Avenue in South Chicago. The church numbered about 25 members. A Free Methodist congregation also met at the church. In 1938, the church was renamed and turned into the United Church of South Chicago, which became Presbyterian and Congregational. The United Church of South Chicago, formerly known as the Swedish Methodist Church, is no longer standing. The former site of the church is now occupied by a parking lot.

#### **Immanuel Lutheran Church**

Immanuel Lutheran, under the leadership of the first resident pastor, H. P. Duborg, had her formal organization on June 20, 1873. At that time 190 Lutherans worked together to build their first house of worship. It was originally known as the First Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Chicago. There is some disagreement over whether the founders were Swedish or German, but the church has been German throughout most of its existence. It contained a school room and parsonage on the first floor and the church auditorium on the second level. Seven months later, on January 11, 1874, the building was dedicated to God's glory. The oldest organization within the congregation, the Ladies Aid Society was established in 1876. Pastor Duborg continued to serve at Immanuel until 1879. Pastor C. Eissfeldt became the second resident pastor. Growth was the main focus of Pastor Eissfeldt. Highlights of this period include the erection of a separate school building, and organization of a church choir in 1880 and a second classroom was added in 1886. Before resigning in 1896 because of ill health, Pastor Eissfeldt was successful in building a new parsonage next to the church and in acquiring a pipe organ. Along with the desire to serve the Church in the best possible way came the decision to replace the original church building. A committee undertook the responsibility and the building program necessitated the purchase of three additional lots. The dedication service was held on January 26, 1908. The cost of the building was \$42,000. On September 3, 1922 the present school building was opened. It was located on the site of the original frame church building. The enrollment of the school reached 223 students soon thereafter. In 1926, a pipe organ was installed in the church balcony. On December 25, 1937, the building was severely damaged by fire. In 1973 the church celebrated its 100th Anniversary. And in recent years the church has closed.



Bethlehem Lutheran



First Church Evangelical Association



Evangelical United Brethren Church

#### Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Bethlehem Lutheran Church was a German Lutheran Church that started in 1874. The leader who established this church was Frederick Eggers, who came to the United States from Germany in 1850. On December 27, 1874, Bethlehem's first official meeting was held. Twelve immigrant German families made up the membership in 1874. At the meeting the name of the Church and the building committee were chosen. The church was first known as the Colehour German Lutheran Church. The early trustees were Fred Eggers, Fred Millis, and Harry Millis. The first church was 40 feet by 24 feet and was built by Mr. F. Blaser, a member of the congregation, at a cost of \$1,175. On July 1, 1875, a school opened with an enrollment of 22 children which later increased that month. It was closed because of the lack of a teacher but was reopened in 1879. The school was dedicated to the four "R's": Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic, and Religion. The school maintained two classes which included six grades until 1915 when a third class was added and the school expanded to eight grades. A second larger Gothic styled wooden church building (shown above) was dedicated in 1891. That building was 50 by 90 feet and the taller of the two spires was 160 feet high. The cost of that church was approximately \$16,000, including furnishings. This Church burned down in a spectacular fire on Maundy Thursday, March 28, 1918. In June of 1919, the original church building was torn down for a new school to be built. On October 12, 1919, the cornerstone was finally laid and the new church built at a cost of \$80,000, opened September 19, 1920. The first English services in the church were held in 1900 but German continued to be used. In the mid 1920's Bethlehem began to change over from holding their services in German to English. In recent years, as the neighborhood has become increasingly Hispanic, there has been some talk of holding services in Spanish.

#### East Side United Methodist

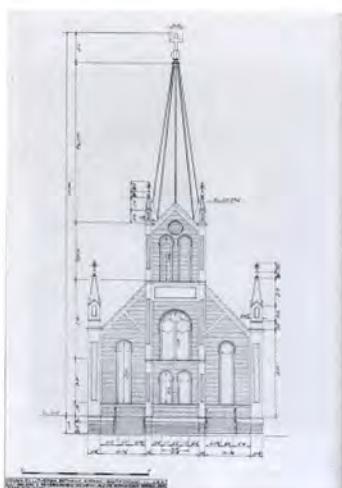
The East Side United Methodist Church was first established in 1875. The first church was built in 1876 on Avenue J north of 99th Street and the first minister was C.J. Shuster. It was originally known as the First Church of the Evangelical Association. It was formed by some of East Side's First German and Swedish Settlers. The first Sunday School opened in 1876 with 18 pupils. In 1913 the congregation sold the property on 98th and Avenue J for \$200 and built a new church located at 10323 Ewing Avenue. That building was later the meeting place of the Trinity Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal group. It is currently the location of the Community Christian Church. While Rev. Lawrence Stauss was pastor, the name of the church was changed to the First Evangelical United Brethren Church. Rev. Stauss was pastor of the church from 1936 until 1971. When he began there were 280 members and when he retired there were over 1300 members in the church. A third church located at 110<sup>th</sup> and Ewing Avenue was constructed in 1954. The architect was Albert Heino and Associates and the contractors were the Olivieri Brothers of the East Side. The church is described as Modern Gothic in style. Ground was broken on June 20, 1954, the cornerstone was laid on October 19, 1954 and the church was dedicated on October 23, 1955. A couple of years later a parsonage was built at 110<sup>th</sup> and Avenue L. A Burning of the Mortgage Ceremony was held in October 1961. After a merger with the Methodist conference in 1969, the church became known as the East Side United Methodist Church. The church has been involved in community affairs throughout its history. The church sponsored Cub Scout, Boy Scout, Explorer units and Girl Scout groups. Troops were taken on trips such as sailing and camping. Boy Scout Troop No. 701 and Girl Scout No. Troop 102 are two of the most famous groups from this church. Boy Scout Troop 701 dates its origins to 1917 and Girl Scout Troop 102 dates back to 1923. The membership of the church has changed over the years as the neighborhood has changed but the church remains very active in community affairs.



**East Side Baptist Church**  
**3501 East 107th Street**



**Swedish Bethany Lutheran Church**  
**91st Houston Avenue**



**Bethany Lutheran**  
**Architect's Drawing**

#### **East Side Baptist Church**

The East Side Baptist Church, currently located at 3500 East 107<sup>th</sup> Street, was the third church formed on the East Side and was a German Church. It was first established in June of 1876, and was originally known as the First German Baptist Church of Colehour until April of 1882. The church was originally a mission of the First German Baptist Church of Chicago's north side. Services and meetings were held at church members houses each week until the Church was formally organized in 1876. The original church building was built in 1876 at a cost of \$780 on land given to the church by the Canal and Dock Company. On April 18, 1882, the Colehour Mission was officially recognized as a self governing church. In the same year another church building was erected at near 92<sup>nd</sup> and Burley Avenue and was operated as a mission of the Colehour Church. Also on May 15, 1882, the first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the area was formed at a meeting held in the church. The first pastor of the church was Reverend Gotthard Mengel who served from 1882 to 1891. Around the turn of the century the name of the church was changed to South Chicago German Baptist Church and in November 1899 the South Chicago Mission Church, which was part of the church, was sold to the Swedish Tabernacle Baptist Church for \$3000. In 1906 the church was remodeled and enlarged. In 1930 the name of the church was officially changed to the East Side Baptist Church. In June of 1956, Odgen Park Baptist Church merged with the East Side Baptist church. On Wednesday, April 26, 1967, it was voted to build a new Church and a new building committee was appointed. On June 7, 1971 the old building was torn down and the foundation for the new church was poured on July 9, 1971. The cornerstone was laid September 26 and the new church was completed at a cost of approximately \$95,000 before the end of 1971.

#### **Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethany Church**

In the home of Magnus Johnson on October 8, 1880, five committee members were chosen to look for "church lots." At some later date the same offer was made for lots 13 and 14 in block 70 on the west side of Houston Avenue between 91st and 92nd Streets where the church was erected. In this case the one lot was purchased for \$600.00. At a meeting of the congregation on June 29, 1881, the decision to build a church was made, but on August 8, 1881, they decided that it would cost \$2,700.00 to build. Erick G. Petterson was the architect of the church. Construction began on August 15, 1881. The church was enclosed by December and on Christmas Day, 1881, a "Julotta" service was held in the partially finished church and it may have been the first service held there. At the annual meeting on January 1, 1885, it was proposed that a "schoolhouse" be erected; it was completed in 1886. Toward the end of the century, in 1897, the church started showing signs of deterioration, and in 1899, the committee decided to raise the church up onto a foundation of brick and stone. In 1909, extensive alterations were made to the interior of the church. At an annual meeting on January 27, 1909, it was decided that the chancel be removed and the interior "frescoe painted." At another annual meeting on November 12, 1947, the trustees were authorized to sell the church building for a minimum of \$20,000.00. On June 18, 1948, the offer from Realtor C. Arthur Carlson to purchase the building, excluding the organ, pulpit, chancel furniture, pews, alter painting, bell and other personal property, for \$19,000.00 was accepted. The last services of the congregation in the church were the regular 11:00 A.M. service and a 4:00 P.M. choir service held on Sunday, April 24, 1949. The church building was sold to the National Guard which used it for an armory. About 1958, it became a church again through its purchase by a Baptist congregation. About 1964, it was again sold to a Puerto Rican Pentecostal congregation, and in 1980 it was again sold to a Haitian church. A few years later the church burned down.



**Saints Peter and Paul Church**



**Immaculate Conception Church**

**Immigration Patterns Change 1880 - 1920**

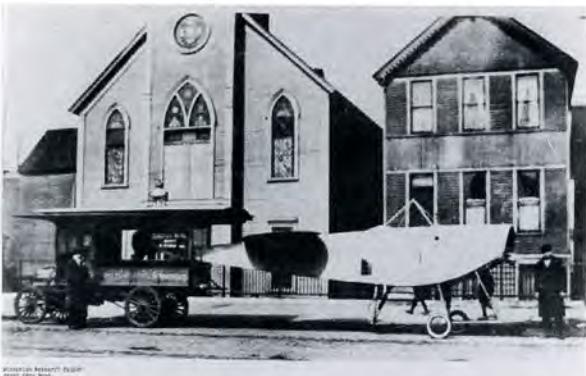
In about 1880 the patterns of immigration to the United States and to the Southeast Side began to change in two important ways. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe began to enter the country and the numbers of immigrants grew. The Polish were the first group to enter this area and begin change the ethnic makeup of the community which up to that point had been English, Irish, Sedish and German. The first Polish parish in the area was Immaculate Conception.

**Saints Peter and Paul Church**

Saints Peter and Paul Church was located at 91st and Exchange and was founded in 1882 to serve German Catholics in the South Chicago area. The new parish first met in a vacant store at 92nd and Baltimore. Later, a church and school building (shown above) was constructed at 91st and Exchange. A parish school opened on November 25, 1882 with an enrollment of 90 pupils. By 1933 the school served 312 students. In September 1936 a high school opened and in 1948 the high school became a girls high school which remained open until 1969. A new combination church school building was built and opened in 1942. The building still stands at 2938 East 91st Street but the parish has closed. The building was designed by Chicago architect George S. Smith and was described as having a streamlined type of architecture. Some parishioners did not like the style saying that it looked like a factory. The church was on the ground floor, the elementary school on the second, and the high school on the third floor. The building had 18 classrooms and an assembly hall with a capacity of 750 persons. By 1942 when the new church building opened, the parish school originally founded for Germans had children of French, English, Italian, Croatian, and Mexican descent. By the mid 1970's the 300 students enrolled in the school were 71% Black, 25% Hispanic, and only 2% were of European descent. The school closed in the early 1980's and the parish shortly afterwards.

**Immaculate Conception Church**

In 1882 Immaculate Conception was built for the Polish families in South Chicago. It is located at 88th and Commercial Avenue. Eventually the parish needed to branch out because of the huge Polish population entering South Chicago. This eventually resulted in three additional Polish national parishes being formed in South Chicago: St. Michael, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Bronislava. On December 19, 1881, land was bought on the southwest corner of 88<sup>th</sup> and Houston Avenue. Later, in 1882, Father Radziejewski was appointed the pastor of Immaculate Conception. Until a church was built, mass was held in a rented store on 92<sup>nd</sup> Street between Ontario (Brandon) and Burley Ave.. This went on until the building caught fire. The parishioners temporarily attended mass at the German Catholic parish of SS. Peter and Paul on 91st and Exchange Avenue. Father Radziejewski sold the land previously bought on Houston Avenue, and took the money to buy ten lots from the Calumet and Chicago Canal and Dock Company for about \$7,345. This new land was located on 88th and Commercial Avenue. Two years later, on March 24, 1884, a school was opened under the administration of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate from Houston Texas. In 1887, a bell tower was placed alongside the original wooden church. A few years later, in 1889, a brick building was built on Exchange Avenue as a parish hall. By 1890, Immaculate Conception had grown to around 1,100 families and was still increasing. Polish families were mainly settling around the Bush area because of the church and the demand for work in the steel mills nearby. The overpopulation resulted in a new parish, St. Michael's, being formed, in 1892, on 83rd and Bond Avenue. Tragedy struck on May 6, 1894, when the church building was destroyed by a fire. On November 11, 1894 the cornerstone of a new Immaculate Conception was laid and, for four years, until the church was completed, mass was held in the basement of the school. Construction of the new building began in 1898, and was completed on April 23, 1899 from plans drawn by architect, Martin A. Carr. The population of the school grew from 500 to 750 children between 1896 and 1899. This was just too many students for the classrooms in the basement. A new school was built. Students began enrolling in the new school, and by 1907, there were already 1,120 children enrolled. Since the Polish population of South Chicago was still growing, St. Mary Magdalene was established as another division of Immaculate in 1910. The church was located on 84th and Marquette Avenue. The last division of the church occurred in 1928, when St. Bronislava was built on 87th and Colfax.



**Evangelical Covenant Church**  
**Towing Max Stupar's Plane in Early 1900's**



**Saint Kevin's Church**  
**St. Stephen's Social Club in Early 1920's**

#### **Evangelical Covenant Church**

The Swedish Christians of this section of South Chicago had talked of the necessity of combining to form a church. They had their background in Lutheran, Methodist and Mission churches. There had been considerable discussion as to whether the new church should be Mission, Methodist or Lutheran. Those in favor of a Mission Church then met and formed the organization in 1883 under the name the Free Swedish Mission Church. On Sundays they first met in the Swedish Baptist church but after a few Sundays they arranged to meet in the old brick church, on Avenue J between 98th and 99th streets, where the First Evangelical Church was then located. At this time Rev. A. G. Nelson was pastor at Pullman and frequently journeyed to South Chicago on Sunday afternoons to preach and help the newly formed church. The little group was ambitious to have a church home of its own and was laying plans to fulfill that desire. In December 17, 1889 they held their first prayer meeting in their own building located on Avenue L between 100th and 101st streets. On September 3, 1892 the church voted to join the Covenant. It was then known as the Evangelical Covenant Church. In the summer of 1901, the church building was remodeled by being raised and a basement constructed under it. The gallery was built inside and the choir loft rearranged so that the appearance of the building was vastly improved both inside and outside. On March 28, 1979 the church burned and was gutted. However, the congregation rebuilt and continued to serve the community. The church closed its doors on June 29, 1997 after 114 years of service.

#### **Saint Kevin's Church**

St. Kevin's Catholic Church is located on 105th and Torrence Avenue on the Southeast Side of Chicago. In 1881, Father Martin A. Van de Laar, of St. Patrick's Church, organized a mission and began to keep separate records for this congregation in Cummings, as the area was then known. St. Kevin is a territorial Catholic parish. The current boundaries are from 103rd street to 125th Street (although few families live south of 109th Street) and from Torrence to Yates Avenue. It was officially established as a parish in 1884 under the leadership of Father Timothy O'Sullivan. Through these years the church underwent many obstacles. The parish held its services in a hall at 106th and Torrence for two years after which it moved to the public school at 108th and Calhoun. In the fall of 1885, Father O' Sullivan purchased six lots from Notre Dame University, which originally had plans to build a boys school there. It was not until July of 1887 that the first mass was said in the frame church (shown above) at 105th and Torrence. The original frame church was almost destroyed by a wind storm as it neared completion. Father Sullivan opened a mission church in Hegewisch, St. Columba, and later, another at St. Bride's in 1900. It is said that the pastor of St. Kevin's in 1900, Rev. David Crimmins, gave the name South Deering to the community formerly called Irondale or Cummings, to honor the head of the International Harvester Company for his generosity to the parish. The frame church building was replaced by a new building housing a church, school, and church hall in 1925. The architect of the new structure was James Burns. The first mass in the new church was celebrated on Christmas Day 1925. The original parishioners of St. Kevin's were predominantly Irish. The names of the sixteen parishioners killed during World War II (Cichantk, Gianquilio, Graff, Janotta, Juda, Kovacovich, Koziol, Krause, Mercon, Monocchio, Przybyla, Ruiz, Rios, Schoenfeld, Wisz, and Zehme) reflect the ethnic diversification that had taken place in the neighborhood by that time period. According to the 100<sup>th</sup> Jubilee booklet, published in 1981, the 300 families in the parish were 40% Mexican, 20% Irish, 20% Polish, and the remaining 20% Italian, German, Slav, and African American. At the time of the 100th Anniversary the school had 110 students enrolled. In a recent interview Pastor Alfredo Gundrum, who has been there since July of 1994, stated that one of the best aspects of St. Kevin's history was the integration of Hispanics into the parish. The present ethnic make up of the congregation, according to Fr. Gundrum is 60 % Mexican, 38% mixed white ethnic, and 2% African American.



**St. Columba Church  
133rd and Green Bay Avenue**



**St Petri Church  
103rd and Avenue L**

### **St. Columba Church**

St. Columba Church was established in 1884 as a mission project from St. Kevin Church, which is located on 105<sup>th</sup> Torrence Ave. St. Columba was the first Catholic church to be founded in Hegewisch. It was a territorial parish serving the Hegewisch community. Reverend Timothy D. O'Sullivan, pastor of St. Kevin Church, sent construction workers to construct St. Columba Church at 133<sup>rd</sup> and Green Bay. Between 1893 and 1896, St. Columba was under the care of St. Andrew the Apostle Church located in Calumet City, Illinois. The frame building shown above was finished and dedicated on August 22, 1886. In 1900, Reverend M. Chodniewicz was appointed pastor of this small Catholic congregation. He served his pastorship there until 1905, when he began organizing a Polish church in Hegewisch, St. Florian. For the following thirty years, Carmelite priests traveled to Hegewisch every Sunday morning to celebrate mass for the English speaking Catholics in the neighborhood. There was no permanently assigned priest at the parish. St. Columba church remained alive during the period from 1905 to 1935 through hard work and perseverance of strong minded people. This church was close to death several times, and on a sick-bed all the time, if it was compared to the average Chicago parish at that time. But still the struggle continued and the congregation stayed alive. In May 1935, Reverend Edward D. Holloway, a former assistant at Our Lady of Peace Church, was named pastor. A special mass in honor of the golden jubilee of the construction of St. Columba church was held on June 29, 1937. During the 1930's there was a parish membership of 125 families. After WWII the neighborhood and parish began to grow and under the leadership of Father Kelly a brick church and school structure was constructed on 134<sup>th</sup> St. between Green Bay Avenue and Avenue O. The Benedictine Sisters opened the parish school for the first time on September 24, 1951 with one hundred sixty pupils from kindergarten to the first sixth grade. On December 2, 1951 at Solemn High Mass, Cardinal Stritch blessed the church and school and preached the sermon. On November 28, 1959, St. Colomba celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At that point in time, 700 families belonged to the parish, and 430 children were going to St. Columba School. In September 2001 the school closed its doors due to declining enrollment but the parish remains open.

### **St. Petri Church**

This church was founded several missionaries who set out to minister to the German immigrants of the East Side community. In 1885, these charter members purchased 3 lots of land for a sum of \$600. These missionaries were from the society known as Home Mission Board of the Northern Illinois District of the Evangelical Synod. On October 25, 1885 the congregation built their first church. It was known as St. Petri Evangelical and Reformed Church. However, the young church was in major need of more financial funding. The church hardly had enough money to buy proper church needs. Benches with no backs were the first pews and a borrowed organ and a borrowed clock were basically the only things which the church obtained with its own funding. In 1891, Leonard Syler, a member of the church and a carpenter contractor, erected the present church structure facing Avenue L at a cost of \$10,000. The original wooden structure had been designed by Diethelm and Franz Roy in a style common to churches in Germany. The church was known as the Evangelical St. Petri Church. Over the years improvements and remodeling have kept up with the times. In 1925, at a cost of \$22,000, a parish hall was built. This hall was used as a community hall for many years and many important matters involving the East Side were decided within these walls. Since the congregation's vast majority was German, the services were given in German until 1929. In 1934, after a merger of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church of the United States, the name of the Church changed to St. Petri Evangelical and Reformed Church. From the original 19 members, the church grew to 500 members as of 1950. In 1999 producers from the TV series "Early Edition" used the church in an episode and the \$6,000 which was earned was used to restore the exterior of the building. In 1999 the congregation consisted of roughly 350 members, about 50 of which attend services on Sundays. The church is currently known as the St. Petri United Church of Christ.



Hegewisch Methodist Church



St. Francis De Sales 1909



St. Francis De Sales Interior 1889

### Hegewisch Methodist Church

Methodism was one of the first religions to form and establish a church in Hegewisch. Meetings began in February, 1885 over a store owned by a Mr. Lewis. Mr. A.J. Bell, a lay Evangelist from the Chicago District Missionary and Church Extension Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, conducted the services, on May 7, 1885. Within a little while, the small congregation would acquire a small church building, located at 13315 Brandon Avenue, but they would get rid of this building when it was sold in 1905. Until 1906, services were held in the Old Opera House. Mr. John Harris, the first Sunday School Superintendent, went to a real estate company to ask for a lot at half price and a little book for subscriptions, which would allow them to place new members in that book after they subscribed. After that, he then went to Mr. Adolph Hegewisch, who was the president of the United States Rolling Stock Company. He and his employees, along with some other generous people, subscribed to a total of \$135.00. This, at that time, was enough to buy lumber from the St. Louis World Exposition to build the new church on the land purchased. The new church was located on 13501 S. Burley Avenue. It was officially dedicated on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1906. There would be a total of \$4,000.00 in pledges made toward the church, along, with an \$800.00 mortgage on the church, to complete it in its new location. Paying the mortgage was hard. At one time when the mortgage was due, Reverend Swaney, borrowed \$800.00 on his own personal life insurance policy to pay off the mortgage. The parsonage was built between 1919 and 1920. The church would prosper for a long time. The church would once again have a celebration this time for their Centennial Anniversary on Sunday, September 29, 1985. The Methodist Church of Hegewisch did not just serve as a place of worship for its congregation, but as a place to socialize too. People of the church would come to play bingo, pinochle, talk, with friends, and sometimes to have a meal with one another. On January 4, 1998, the church closed its doors. This occurred due to a dwindling congregation and a growing Catholic population. The building was put on the market for \$120,000.00. In its place today, is a different church, that goes by the name of the New Jerusalem Church.

### St. Francis De Sales Church

The history of St. Francis De Sales begins with Reverend Patrick Feehan, the Archbishop of Chicago. In 1888 he chose Father Mathias M. Barth, of St. Peter and Paul Church in South Chicago to organize a parish on the East Side, then called Colehour. It took him a year of hard work, but the St. Francis church and school opened in 1889. The original frme church (shown above) was located at 10215 Ewing Avenue. The original parishioners were mostly Germans and Luxemburgers although it was a territorial parish. Its boundaries were the Calumet river, Lake Michigan, the state line, and 114<sup>th</sup> Street. Father J. P. Suerth was appointed pastor in 1899. When he arrived, he found the church and school in terrible conditions. Father Suerth was a very hardworking priest who built up the parish and made it successful. In 1910, Father Suerth had the honor of being the presiding priest of the first Chinese man to convert to the Catholic faith in Chicago. Hundreds of people from all over the East Side and many priests came for the ceremony. This was also the year ground was broken for the construction of a new church and school building. It took the church 25 years to pay off the new building, which at the time cost them \$250,000, in January 1925. Then a terrible tragedy occurred on the following Friday after the completed payment. The church caught fire and was left in ruins. To make things worse, Father Suerth's health began to fail which led to his death. The reason of how and why the fire exactly started still remains a mystery. Reconstruction of the church began right away, in June of the year of the fire. Less than two years later, a combination church and school building was rebuilt. George Cardinal Mundelein dedicated the new church building on May 8, 1927. A commercial high school was opened in 1908 and became a four year academic school by 1938. By the 1950s, there was a need to expand the school, but instead of an expansion on the old building, a whole new school building was built. On April 20, 1958, Archbishop William O'Brien presided at the dedication of the new building. In 1964 there were 567 students in the elementary school and 1020 in the high school. Today the elementary school is closed and the high school has only a few hundred students enrolled.



Bethesda Lutheran 1892



St. Michael Church School 1892



St. Michael Archangel

#### Bethesda Lutheran Church

The church was founded in a home located at 10065 Indianapolis Boulevard on July 22, 1891. The pastor of Bethany Lutheran church from South Chicago, G. Lundahl, presided over the meeting. The original church was located at 10135 Avenue L and one could see Lake Michigan at that time from the back of the church. The cost of the original church was \$236.95 since much of the labor was donated by church members. In the early years the services were conducted in Swedish and a summer school was held to make sure that the children of the church knew the Swedish language. On February 15, 1920 the church was destroyed by fire. For several years the services were held at various places around the neighborhood including Gallistel School, the Oddfellows Hall, St. Petri's Church, and the First Evangelical Church. On July 22, 1923, at a cost of \$77,000, a new church, located at 105<sup>th</sup> and Avenue J, was dedicated. The cost did not include an organ nor interior decorations. In 1995 the 104 year old church, faced with problems of declining membership and financial problems, closed its doors and its members transferred to Lebanon Lutheran church in the Hegewisch community. A joint worship service of Bethesda and Lebanon churches on January 7, 1996 marked the closing of the church.

#### St. Michael Polish Catholic Church

As the Polish population of South Chicago increased, it became apparent that one church, Immaculate Conception, would not adequately serve their needs. St. Michael parish was organized from territory originally part of Immaculate Conception parish and referred to as the "Bush". The new church was founded in 1892 at 83<sup>rd</sup> and South Shore Drive. A small temporary building was used until a brick combination church-school building (shown above) was constructed at 83<sup>rd</sup> and Brandon. By 1907 the parish had 1200 families. In March 1907 ground was broken for a new church at 83<sup>rd</sup> and South Shore Drive. The architect was William J. Brinkman and he designed a magnificent Gothic structure which was dedicated on May 23, 1909. Poles continued to move into the area and in 1910 another Polish parish, St. Mary Magdalene parish at 84<sup>th</sup> and Marquette, was opened. By 1925 the enrollment of the parish school was over 1900 students. In 1937 a two year commercial high school was opened, later expanded to a four year academic program and eventually became a girls high school. The high point of St. Michael occurred under the leadership of Rev. John M. Lange who was assigned to the parish in 1915 and served as pastor until 1960 when he died. At that time St. Michael's had 2,000 families in membership, over 800 students in the elementary school, and 261 girls in the high school. The high school closed in 1968 due to declining enrollment. In recent years the ethnic makeup of the parish has changed from Polish to predominantly Mexican. At one time masses were said in Polish, English, and Spanish each Sunday. Visitors are impressed by the beautiful, magnificent interior of the church which was not changed, as so many Catholic churches were, after the Vatican II conference.

#### St. Bride Church

Although not technically located in the South Chicago community, St. Bride, at is a territorial Catholic parish whose boundaries extend into South Chicago. When originally founded, its boundaries were from 67<sup>th</sup> Street to 87<sup>th</sup> Street and from Jeffrey to Lake Michigan, including "the three pretty suburban residence districts of Cheltenham, Windsor Park, and South Shore." The parish boundaries were reduced with the creation of St. Philip Neri and Our Lady of Peace parishes. The parish was organized as a mission by the Rev. Timothy Sullivan, pastor of St. Kevin Church in South Deering. It became a full parish in 1900 when Father Sullivan was assigned as permanent pastor. Ground was broken for a new French Gothic building at 78<sup>th</sup> and Coles Avenue in 1907 and the church was dedicated on June 6, 1909. Most of the early families were of Irish descent.



**Lebanon Lutheran Church**



**East Side Bible Church**



**Agudath Achim  
Bikur Cholim Synagogue**

#### **Lebanon Lutheran Church**

By the end of 1895, fifty or more Swedish families settled in Hegewisch. These people needed a church. This led to two organizational meetings held in Nelson's Feed store. Thus began Lebanon Lutheran Church. By Christmas of 1896, the Congregation worshiped in their new church located at Brandon Avenue. From 1906 to 1916, Lebanon struggled to do ministry with the help of interim pastors and seminary students. Only one minister stayed more than a year. In 1923, a parsonage was built at 132<sup>nd</sup> and Brandon Ave. During the years 1956 to 1966 of its existence, Lebanon experienced a time of decision. Reverend Ross Larson became pastor in 1958. He was assigned by the president of the Augustana Illinois Conference to help close the small church that never outgrew its mission status. He failed, because Avalon Trails opened up and gave the church a chance to grow. A new church would be built. In 1963, land was purchased at 131<sup>st</sup> and Manistee to build the new church. From 1966 to 1976, there was much fund-raising and saving for the new church. After much of this, the cornerstone for the new building was laid on October 26, 1969. On March 29, 1970, the first services were held in the new church building. In January of 1996, Bethesda Lutheran Church became part of the church when the East Side church closed and sold its building. Over its hundred year history Lebanon has changed much. It has moved and grown in the community of Hegewisch and has touched other parts of the Southeast Side of Chicago by joining with other congregations.

#### **East Side Bible Church**

East Side Bible Church was founded originally as the Church of Christ. It is located at 10524 Avenue N and began on January 1, 1900. Some of its founders were Rev. C. F. Pattullo, Mr. Bitcon, and Mr. Fitzgerald. Patullo remained pastor for the church until 1945. It was later known as the 106<sup>th</sup> Street Mission before finally becoming known as the East Side Baptist Church. The current building was built in 1915 and dedicated on December 5, 1915. The church has always served multiple ethnic groups unlike most of the churches in the community which at their origin tended to serve a single ethnic group.

#### **Agudath Achim Bikur Cholim Synagogue**

Agudath Achim-Bikur Cholim is an Orthodox Jewish synagogue located at 8927 Houston Avenue in the South Chicago community. Bikur Cholim, the original congregation at this site, was issued a charter by the State of Illinois in July 1888 and the City of Chicago issued a permit in May 1902 to construct a synagogue at the present address. Built and completed in 1902, it housed a congregation of 500 Eastern European Jewish families at its peak. Designed by architect Alfred Alschuler, the Romanesque structure is almost hidden away in a row of houses on Houston Ave. It was the first public building built without obstructing support posts. The synagogue also has excellent acoustics. The synagogue had a separate balcony for women because Orthodox Judaism requires the separation of men and women during religious services. In 1972 Congregation Agudath Achim, located at 7933 S. Yates, sold its facilities and merged with Bikur Cholim. Agudath Achim means "society of brothers" and Bikur Cholim means "visiting the sick". In recent years most of the Jewish population of the area has moved and there was difficulty maintaining a "minyon", a quorum of 10 men needed to hold religious services. Since 1994 the synagogue has shared its building with the Beth Shalom B'nai Zakam Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation. Some of the members of the former synagogue still worship there. The synagogue has the distinction of being Chicago's oldest continuously operating synagogue and is the only synagogue in the city south of 55th street and east of Kedzie. This remnant of a South Chicago past that prominently featured Jews and Jewish institutions remains. The Hispanic names on store fronts in the neighborhood give no hint that many of the businesses in the first half of the century were owned by European Jews.



St. George Church



St. George School Graduation Class 1953



St. Florian Church

### St. George Church

St. George Church began in the June of 1903. The Slovenian immigrant population that came to Southeast Chicago became so numerous that it got to the point where there was a need to organize a church. Rev. Pleunik purchased the church site, originally located at 95th Street between Avenues M and N. With the purchase of this site, a committee petitioned in 1902 to have the Archbishop of Chicago aid them in obtaining a Slovenian priest. Rev. John Kranjec of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, responded to the call. The first thing he did was purchase three additional lots on Ewing Avenue at 96th Street, because the original site was not large enough. During the eight months prior to the building of the church, Sunday Masses were held in the old Eagle Hall on Houston Avenue in South Chicago. The original intention was to build a small wooden church, but with the turn of the century, there was a gradual expansion of industry in the Calumet region. So the wooden church project was turned into a large brick structure, with the amount of this project increasing to \$30,000. The initial ground was broken on June 26, 1903. The parishioners had volunteered and within a weeks time, had dug out the foundation and laid in the first stone. Construction went smoothly, and the first Holy Mass was celebrated on December 6, 1903. The actual dedication did not occur until June 19, 1904, to permit the completion of the interior. Around 1912, a calamity developed when the Croatian membership of the parish separated themselves from St. George to create and develop their own church and school, Sacred Heart in neighboring South Deering. St. George Church also had a significant number of Italians in their parish. The interior of the church was completely redecorated, with a mural painting done by Slovenian artist, John Gosar, in 1924. Four years later, in 1928 , the church celebrated its 25th anniversary, stained glass windows were installed, and massive statuary of the stations of the cross were added. Ground was broken in the fall of 1949 for a school. Work progressed rapidly, and six lower grades opened in September of 1950. In 1978, the church celebrated its Diamond Jubilee, of over 75 years of service. The church continues to serve but the school closed in the 1990's due to declining enrollment

### St. Florian Church

The Polish population was growing in Hegwisch around the turn of the century. They did not have a church to call their own, so they could worship freely. So a group of Polish men gathered together to build a church. The original location of St. Florian was 131<sup>st</sup> and Houston Avenue. It is now located on the corner of 132nd and Houston Avenue. The church was built in 1905 after Reverend James Edward Quigley, Archbishop of Chicago, gave permission to Reverend F. Chodniewicz, at that time the pastor of St. Colomba in Hegewisch, to build a church for the Polish community. So Reverend Chodniewicz began the preparations to make this church at once. After much determination and hard work the church was completed, and St. Florian was born. A small wooden structure (see photo above) that seated about two hundred people was built. The church was said to have cost an estimated \$10,000. About one hundred families and two hundred single men attended this church, when it first opened. In 1907 Reverend Quigley gave Reverend Chodniewicz permission to construct a school. The school was made from pressed bricks. It was in the Roman style. The school was three stories high and consisted of eight classrooms. On the first floor of the school is the parish hall. The school building cost \$35,000 to build. The St. Florian Catholic School opened in 1908. However, the leadership of Reverend Chodniewicz was cut short. On January 27, 1922 the Reverend was brutally killed by a gun shot. An intruder allegedly tried to break into the rectory to drink the sacramental wine. Father Nowicki, the next pastor, immediately began planning a new combination church and school. This idea became a reality and in 1927 its construction was complete. This is the structure that is currently located on 132nd and Houston. In the following years a new convent and school were built for the 6th, 7th, and 8th, grades, which included a library and a modern science room. In 1980, there were 1,400 families that belonged to St. Florian Church and 461 children were enrolled in the school. The CCD program had an annual enrollment of about 400 people.



**St. Joseph Church**



**Bethel Free Church**



**St. John the Baptist Church**

#### **St. Joseph Church**

St. Joseph Catholic Church was established in 1900 by Lithuanian immigrants who, like other ethnic groups, wanted to worship in their own language. Permission was granted to form a Lithuanian church on the southeast side of Chicago via a petition. Rev. Michael Peza was appointed the first pastor. Fr. Peza started working to establish St. Joseph. At first he said mass at the Louis Tomaszewski Hall at 8801 Commercial Avenue. He obtained property on 88th Street between Marquette and Saginaw Avenue. A small wooden church was built at 8812 Marquette. Fr. Peza remained as resident pastor until 1903. For a couple of years there was one permanent priest assigned to the small parish. In 1905, Rev. Anthony Petraitis was assigned as pastor and was to serve the parish until 1931. One of his first tasks was to build a rectory at 8801 S. Saginaw in 1908. Father Petraitis, who was an amateur astronomer, eventually built an observatory near the church which housed the second largest telescope in Illinois. A new church was built in 1949 and a school in 1953. At the time of the diamond jubilee of the parish in 1975 there were 330 families and 210 children enrolled in the school. Due to declining enrollment the school was closed in September 1977. A few years later the parish was also closed.

#### **Bethel Free Church**

Bethel Free Church was first organized on May 25, 1907, in the home of Theodore Carlson, with fourteen charter members. Services were conducted in a school house on 103rd Street between Avenue L and Ewing, beginning Sunday, June 9, 1907. On March 10, 1908 it was decided to purchase lots at 10324 Avenue J. Here, a one story building (shown above) was constructed and dedicated June 13th, 1908. It was during the pastorate of John Hawkinson, 1919-1923, that the church was incorporated with the name, "The Swedish Evangelical Free Church in South Chicago". It was then that the first church "constitution" was formed. The need for a larger facility was met and a new church building was erected in 1925 and dedicated Sunday afternoon, March 7, 1926. This building was located in the same lot as original church building was. In 1934 a second constitution was adopted and the name of the church was changed to Bethel Free Church. In 1936 the English language almost entirely replaced Swedish. On September 13, 1966, the church voted to authorize the trustee board to negotiate a loan of \$18,000.00. This money was to be used to remodel the front of the building and to redecorate the sanctuary. Bethel Free Church had difficulty finding a new pastor to minister to the decreasing number of members of the church. Community Christian Church of Chicago, located at 10323 Ewing Avenue bought Bethel Free and it is now one church under the name Community Christian Church of Chicago. The former Bethel Free Church building, which is located across the alley, is now referred to as the Annex Building.

#### **St. John the Baptist**

St. John the Baptist was a Slovak Catholic parish located in South Chicago at 9129 Burley Avenue. At one time there were nine Slovak Catholic parishes in Chicago and at the time of St. John's 80th Anniversary in 1989, there were only four remaining and since that time St. John the Baptist has also closed its doors. The church was founded on May 16, 1909 to serve the needs of Slovak immigrants on Chicago's southeast side. The first pastor of the church was Rev. John Novotny. The church building (shown above) was purchased from a Protestant congregation and intended as a temporary location for the parish. It was to be the only church ever used by the parish. It was a small parish, the church seated 250, and had a meeting hall beneath the church and a rectory next door. Several organizations and societies were affiliated with the parish. St. John the Baptist was unusual because it never opened a parish school. Most Catholic parishes had a parish school, especially the national parishes, because of the desire of immigrants to maintain their native language. Religious instruction was given in the parish hall but no school was ever opened. Since its closing in the early 1990's the building has been purchased by the neighboring Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and is used for various church activities and programs.



**St. Mary Magdalene Church**



**Sacred Heart Church**

### **St. Mary Magdalene Church**

St. Mary Magdalene is a Polish Catholic parish built at 84<sup>th</sup> and Marquette Avenue in 1910 to relieve overcrowding at neighboring Immaculate Conception parish which was located at 88<sup>th</sup> and Commercial. It was the second parish to be carved out of Immaculate's boundaries as the Polish population of South Chicago continued to increase in the early years of the century. Father Francis M. Wojtalewicz, pastor of Immaculate Conception bought 24 lots between Marquette and Saginaw at 84<sup>th</sup> Street for \$5,375.40 and, with land secured, he requested that the Archbishop of Chicago divide his parish. Permission to divide the parish was granted and Rev. Edward Kowaleski was appointed pastor and would serve for 21 years. Plans were drawn up for a three story combination church, school, and hall. The architect was John Flizidowski and the church cost almost \$100,000 when completed. The new building was dedicated on July 17, 1911. The parish grew quickly, from 200 families in 1911, to 500 families in 1913, and to 1050 families in 1917. 632 children were enrolled in the parish school at that time. Parish membership peaked in the years after WW II when 1500 families were registered as parishioners. From 1910 to the 1950s the neighborhood around the church was 90% Polish and 95% Catholic. In April 1952 ground was broken for a new church, and the cornerstone was laid on September 21, 1952. The new church building was blessed by Samuel Cardinal Stritch on May 2, 1954. In 1960 the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary and at the time 703 students attended the parish school.

### **Sacred Heart Church**

Sacred Heart was founded by immigrant Catholic Croatians who originally worshiped at St. George's, the Slovenian Catholic church on the East Side. It was located at 96th and Escanaba and was the 3rd Croatian parish in Chicago. It opened Christmas Day 1913 and was dedicated on May 17, 1914 by Archbishop James E. Quigley. There first pastor was Rev. Ivan A. Stipanovic. The parish school opened shortly after the parish opened under the direction of the sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King, of Lemont, Illinois. Rev Luke Tersich, OFM was pastor of Sacred Heart from 1919 to 1922. During his pastorate , enrollment in the school increased from 230 to 320 pupils. The rectory was built in 1928-1929 at 2864 E. 96th Street. A structure at 9620 S. Commercial Ave was remodeled as a social center and sports facility and was referred to as Croatian Hall. By 1958 more than \$100,000 had been raised for a new church and school. The school was dedicated on Sept 22, 1959 by His Eminence Cardinal Albert Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago. At that time Sacred Heart Parish was free of debt, a testament to the generosity of 600 families who made up the parish. At the parish's Golden Jubilee celebrated on Nov 10, 1963 construction was begun on a new church. The dedication ceremony took place on June 21 1964. The brick structure at 96th and Escanaba was designed by the architectural firm of Fox & Fox and completed at a cost of \$350,000. A number of problems had to be overcome in the building of the new church. The only property which was available was located on Escanaba Avenue and was not large enough for the church which was planned. The alley on the north side of the church was obtained. A new alley was created which ran through the portion of the school playground. A house next to the newly acquired property was bought and torn down which added an additional 25 feet to the site. this gave the parish the minimum land necessary to build the new church. The bells from the old church are now located at St. Anthony Mission in Neopit, Wisconsin. On May 19, 1963 the blessing of the cornerstone took place. Historical documents related to the parish were sealed and placed in the cornerstone. In Oct 4, 1968 a new sisters residence was built at 2906 E 96th to replace the old one. Today the parish of Sacred Heart has over 600 families and a membership which includes families of Croatian descent who have been in the South Chicago area for years as well as Polish and Hispanic families who have been attending services as well.



**St. Michael Archangel  
Serbian Orthodox Church**



**St. Michael Serbian Church  
Icons in Interior**



**Assumption  
Greek Orthodox Church**

#### **St. Michael Archangel Serbian Orthodox Church**

Serbs began to come to the Southeast Side in the late 1890's. Like other ethnic groups they left their homeland to seek better jobs and many of them intended to return home when they had saved some money. In 1904 South Chicago was designated as a parish district named "Serbian Orthodox Parochial District of St. Elijah." When the Serbs had their religious services, they initially rented halls which were mostly located along 91<sup>st</sup> street between Brandon and Burley. In 1919 they finally bought a formerly Danish Lutheran Church located at 3016 East 98<sup>th</sup> Street for \$1,000. All interior furnishings were also bought for \$35. A committee selected St. Archangel Michael as the name for the new church. By 1924 members of the church realized that the church they had bought five years ago was too small to house the growing Serbian population. In March of 1924 a committee was chosen to find a place for the new church. The committee was also supposed to look for property for a cemetery. The church committee decided to purchase five lots on the 9800 block of Commercial Avenue for \$4,550.00. A contractor and an architect were selected by the church's committee. The contractor was Zygmund F. Jakobowski and Franz Roy, whose offices were at 9046 S. Commercial Avenue, was the architect. In September 18, 1926 construction began, as well as a religious ceremony that was performed by Reverend George Milosavljevich in honor of the construction. The old Lutheran church was sold for \$3,250. In the early 1940's the church bought the vacant lot at 9801 Commercial and later built a school and church hall on the property. A picnic grove made up of 13 lots on the 9800 block of Houston Avenue was purchased in September 1954. The church at 98<sup>th</sup> and Commercial Avenue served the Serbian community for 75 years until several years ago they decided to leave their traditional Russian style onion domed church and relocate to Lansing, a southern suburb of Chicago. They moved to Lansing on July 2, 1998. There they built their Church next to the St. Archangel Michael Serbian Cultural Center at 186th Street and Stony Island Avenue. They have moved out of the area because of the fact that the majority of the parishioners have also moved. With Lansing being the church's geographical center an estimated 70 percent of the congregation has left the area of South Chicago. The church's congregation now brings in families from surrounding suburbs and from northwest Indiana. In order for them to have constructed their new church they had to sell their old one, and they sold it to an Ethiopian Orthodox group.

#### **Assumption Greek Orthodox Church**

On February 3, 1921, some of the Greeks from Hegewisch met in the home of John Tsolakos, at 13445 Burley to discuss an establishment of a Greek afternoon school. They selected a committee of twelve members to study the matter of the school. They also contributed a total of \$233.00 and thus the founding of the school was on its way. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, the school received its name, Homer. There would also be a priest invited for the Holy Week of April 7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> to come and celebrate. Reverend Dimitriadi was the priest asked to come. He accepted and thus he became the first of many priests to serve the community of Hegewisch. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, everyone decided that it was time to establish a church and have the priest teach at the school too. There was a general meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup>, in which it was decided to buy a building to house the church and to make a new constitution. A few weeks later on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, the new church was named Assumption of Mary, named after the Holy Virgin Mary. The purchase of the building took place a little while after on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1926, and the first meeting at the new building was held on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1926. In 1936, the church building burned down in a fire, but the parishioners were able to build a new church, which opened on September 6, 1937. Additional construction would occur thirty years later, in 1967, when the building was extended by thirty-five and a half feet. The church was and still is located at 13631 S. Brainard.



**Our Lady of Guadalupe Original Church**



**Our Lady of Guadalupe Second Church**

#### **Changes in Ethnic Patterns**

In the 1920's major changes began to occur in the ethnic makeup of the Southeast Side. European immigration had slowed with the events of World War I and United States immigration policy changed radically in the 1920's greatly reducing European immigration. Mexicans began to enter the community and settled in the area east of the Illinois Central railroad tracks in South Chicago. As time went on African Americans began to come to the community in greater numbers and many of the white ethnic groups began to move to the surrounding suburbs and to northwest Indiana.

#### **Our Lady of Guadalupe**

Our Lady of Guadalupe is located at 91st Street and Brandon Avenue in the South Chicago community. It is the oldest Mexican parish in Chicago. This Roman Catholic parish started when Fr. William Kane S. J. began ministering to the religious needs of Mexicans in South Chicago in 1923. The area was inhabited by many Mexican Catholics that worked in the area's steel mills. South Chicago was a port of entry for incoming Mexican immigrants. A small wooden church (above left) was erected in 1924 at 9024 South Mackinaw Avenue. Father John Maiztegui, a Claretian priest, was named pastor in 1924 beginning a long history of that group of priests serving the parish. In fall of 1926 land was purchased at the corner of 91<sup>st</sup> and Brandon for a new church. The three story brick building (above right) was dedicated in September 1928. At the time there were about 8,000 Mexicans in the area. In 1929 Father James Tort established the National Shrine of St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. In 1947 the parish built a new elementary school at 91<sup>st</sup> and Burley Avenue. An addition to the school was completed in 1960. In 1973 at the time of its Golden Jubilee the parish had 1,200 families and 330 children enrolled in the school.

#### **Mexican Social and Community Organizations**

##### **Mexican Patriotic Club**

The Mexican Patriotic Club was initiated in the late 1930's from a previously existing club called the Mexican Patriotic Committee. The committee was founded through the efforts of the directors of Hull House. They wanted to have a committee in every community in Chicago and all together they would be called Mexican Patriotic Committees. Priests at Our Lady of Guadalupe sent representatives of the Mexican Patriotic Club through the church and also gave permission to use the church hall. The first Mexican Patriotic Club president was chosen. He was Father Montoya. The secretary of the committee was Mr. Severino Lopez, and Father Saenz was the treasurer. Later on the Mexican Patriotic Club had to be closed because both Father Montoya and Father Saenz were transferred to other churches out of Chicago. This caused a lack of direction in the club. Fortunately in 1948 the club came back and new officers were chosen. The new organization was called The Mexican Patriotic Club. A social center was finally obtained in November 30, 1974 at 8521 Commercial. The Mexican Independence Day Parade is sponsored by the Mexican Patriotic Club. The parade traditionally traveled from 91st Street and Houston and ended at the Mexican Patriotic Club.

##### **Mexican Community Committee**

The Mexican Community Committee was established in 1959 by Henry H. Martinez with the help of other concerned residents. It began in co-founder "Tiny" Chavez's basement where they all agreed they wanted to help better their community. The Mexican Community Committee is called the MCC for short. The Mexican Community Committee has one purpose and that is to reduce delinquency and to provide social services to the Mexican American community. Among some of the activities offered at the MCC are dances such as Mexican Independence Day dances, homework assistance, individual family and work counseling, organized sports, physical fitness programs, cultural and recreational activities, literacy programs for adults, job development, health advocacy, and HIV/AIDS awareness. By 1965 the MCC raised enough money to rent a store front for its local headquarters. In the mid 1970's it purchased a large building of four stories, the former Masonic Lodge located at 91<sup>st</sup> and Exchange Avenue.



**Zion Lutheran Church**  
**3311 East 91st Street**



**Pilgrim Baptist Church**  
**3311 East 91st Street**



**St. Bronislava Church**  
**8716 Colfax Avenue**

### **Pilgrim Baptist Church**

Pilgrim Baptist was originally founded by ten members from the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church that was located in the Millgate community of South Chicago. These people came together in 1917 to form and establish the beginnings of the future Pilgrim Baptist Church. The church's first Pastor, Reverend Frank Gaskin, led the growing population of the church which was originally, and still are, African American congregants. Shortly after 1929 the church was in its third building at 3311 E. 91st Street. By that time they longed for a new church building, but an existing one was selected which is now its present location. The building had previously been home to the Zion Lutheran Church. In September of 1945 the congregants had a candlelight procession to their present location 3235 E. 91st Street. They had a building to call their own. This Bible believing, spirit-filled church, also takes pride in its history making events. The gospel scene of the original "Blues Brothers" movie that started Dan Akroyd and John Belushi was shot in the church as was Oprah Winfrey's movie turned series "Brewster's Place". The church is in need of repair work and new construction of annexations are needed to serve Sunday School classes. In 1993 the church had laid out plans for new building projects, but all have not been completed. During the 90's the church grew and conducted workshops for all leaders and established fellowship with the neighboring Catholic Church Our Lady of Guadalupe, and scholarship programs to help the youth attend college. At present the church continues under the leadership of Pastor Hudson.

### **St. Bronislava Church**

The Polish were coming over to the Southeast Side in large numbers during the 1920's. Their first parish was Immaculate Conception, but even though the building was constructed to hold many families, it was not adequate to satisfy the needs of the growing Polish family population. The parish of Immaculate Conception realized this problem and came up with the solution to split the parish up into three different organizations. Over the period of several years Immaculate Conception was broken up to create three additional Polish parishes in South Chicago, St. Bronislava being one of them. Officials were sold fifteen lots for \$54,000.00 from 87th street to Colfax Avenue. Fr. Cyril was the organizer and new Pastor of St. Bronislava. The final building would take up to a year to be finished and until then Pastor Cyril was pushing to rent out the auditorium at Bowen High School to hold the masses. January 8, 1928 was the first mass held in the auditorium. Mass was from 8:00 a.m to 10:00 a.m all throughout the month of January with about seventy five people in attendance. A temporary building was being constructed at 8700 S. Colfax Avenue during this time. This church would hold up to 400 people. Fr. John Lange of St. Michael's, held the first services on February 12, 1928. Immediately afterward, parishioners of the church started organizing to build a church-school combination structure for St. Bronislava. After months of organizing and planning the ground breaking day had finally come. On May 3, 1928 architect, Leo Strelka, made the first move toward the construction of the new church. An opening ceremony took place that morning as well. It consisted of a play from the Dramatic Circle called "Skalmierzanki." Construction of the building went rapidly after the problem with quicksand in the beginning. Msgr. Ostrowski, a pastor of a church on the north side of Chicago, blessed the cornerstone of Bronislava on July 4, 1928 and Fr. Frank Wojtalewicz of Immaculate Conception delivered the first sermon. In September of that same year St. Bronislava School opened with 500 students. To this day the school is under the direction of the Felician Sisters of Chicago, Illinois.



**Annuciata Original Wooden Church**



**St. Hedwig's Polish National Church**

### **Annuciata Church**

The Church of Annuciata was originally established because nearby St. Francis De Sales parish was not able to accommodate all of the worshipers that came to its Sunday services. There were over 800 families living in the East Side area. Another factor for the establishment of a new church was that St. Francis was about two miles away from the new houses being constructed on the south end of the East Side. Archbishop Stritch announced in 1941, the "official" parish boundaries of the new territorial Catholic parish on the East Side. The boundaries were 106th Street to the north, and 118th Street to the south, the Calumet River on the west and Lake Michigan and the Indiana boundary on the east. Annuciata held its first Mass in a maintenance garage at 3650 East 112th Street, and Fr. Philbin was the first priest to serve there. The maintenance garage was located behind the offices of Frank J. Lewis, who was a prominent real estate developer in the East Side area. He would also later donate the land where Annuciata parish is currently located. The foundation for the new parish was laid in 1941. Father Philbin contracted with the Kinnare Corporation to build the frame of the church on Avenue H, between 112th and 111th Street. Frank J. Lewis commissioned his firm to build the church for \$12,000 dollars. Sts. Peter and Paul parish donated the original pews used in the frame structure. The first church of Annuciata (shown above) held its dedication on Sunday, June 21, 1942. The small wooden church became too small to handle its attendance following the end of World War II. Another problem was the number of children in the parish. There was a need to create a grade school. The school opened in September 1949 with eight classrooms and housing accommodations for eight nuns. All of the sisters thought they would have an enrollment of 40 students, but instead the enrollment started with 363 students, with more applying everyday. To accommodate the demand, six more classrooms and a temporary church, which could seat 600, were added to the school because of the increasing enrollment. The temporary church, located in the basement of the school, would later become a Parish Hall and Gymnasium with the completion of the new church in the Fall of 1970. One week following the 25th Anniversary celebration, in 1966, of the original church, the Archbishop granted permission to the parish to build a new Church, with the requirement that the parish pay one third of the cost of building. The initial groundbreaking occurred in late 1968. The total cost of the new church was not to exceed \$750,000. The new building was designed by Architect William J. Butorac to resemble a desert tent. On September 29, 1970, John Cardinal Cody presided at the dedication of the new Church building. The parish has been very active in community affairs throughout its existence. Scout troops were sponsored by the parish. A priest assigned to the parish, Fr. Nicholas Norusis, Fr. Nick to all who knew him, was the founder of the Annuciata Little League, which played on fields located where the current church is sited. That organization continues today as the East Side Little League. Although two other Catholic parish schools on the East Side have closed, Annuciata School is still open and doing very well.

### **St. Hedwig's Polish National Catholic Church**

St. Hedwig is located at 3320 E. 134th Street in Hegewisch. It is part of the Polish National Catholic Church, not part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) was founded in Buffalo, New York in 1897 and has differences of dogma with the Roman Catholic church. It also had disagreements over ownership of church property. The Roman Catholic Church believes that property is owned by the "church" while the PNCC believes that it is owned by the individual parish. Most of its churches, like St. Hedwig's are small and community based. There are approximately 200,000 members, mostly in the United States and Poland. The Hegewisch church was founded in 1940 and originally held its services in the Opera house at 133<sup>rd</sup> and Baltimore Avenue. The cornerstone for the current church building was blessed in 1949. In 1960, when the church celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, there were 110 members that were part of the church.



**Our Lady Gate of Heaven Church**



**St. Simeon Mirotocivi**



**Serbian Orthodox Church**

#### **Our Lady Gate of Heaven**

Our Lady Gate of Heaven is a Catholic territorial parish whose boundaries are 95<sup>th</sup> Street, 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Calumet railroad yards on the west and Torrence Avenue on the east. It was founded in 1948 to serve the newly growing residential area known as Merrionette Manor and Jeffrey Manor. Joseph Merrion, a Chicago developer, filled in the wetlands in the area with slag from the local steel mills and began to build duplexes for the post World War II families moving into the region. The outer area was known as Jeffrey Manor and the central area was known as Merrionette Manor. Currently the area is commonly referred to as the "Manor". Property was donated to the Archdiocese for a Catholic church. Our Lady Gate of Heaven was originally known by its Latin name "Porta Coeli". The church was originally located at 100<sup>th</sup> and Crandon. A combination church-school building was constructed at 2330 E. 99<sup>th</sup> Street and dedicated on April 12, 1953. By 1955 there were 383 students enrolled in the school. The church has been active in community affairs and responsible for the formation of community organizations. The life of the parish has been marked by transition as the neighborhood changed from predominantly white to African American.

#### **St. Simeon Mirotocivi Serbian Orthodox Church**

St. Simeon Mirotocivi is a Serbian Orthodox Church located at 114<sup>th</sup> and Avenue G on the East Side. The congregation was organized in 1964. The cornerstone for the new church was blessed in January 1969. A block of 48 lots was purchased for the church, a hall, and pavilions. The design of the church is a copy of the Serbian medieval monastery of Kalenich according to architects Pavlecic, Kovacevich and Markovich. The style is the Morava School of Serbian Byzantine architecture. There are no pews in the church because the worshipers conduct their services in the old style. Saint Simeon was founded by about 200 families who split from St. Archangel Michael Serbian Orthodox church over a dispute arising from a Yugoslavian government decision to defrock an anti-communist American bishop. The split ended in 1992, although the churches remain separate.

#### **A Note About Churches**

This booklet has concentrated on the older or more historical churches located in Chicago's Southeast Side. A few of the old churches have been omitted because historical records, photographs, or materials about the histories of these churches are not available. More newly established churches, founded by more recent groups of newcomers to the community, have also been omitted because materials about their history are lacking. The Southeast Historical Museum continues to acquire materials related to community and church histories. Church anniversary books are particularly important and needed to enhance the museum collection. Should any reader have access to church anniversary books or other historical materials from Southeast Side churches and congregations, please contact the Southeast Historical Museum located in the Calumet Park Field House at 9801 S. Avenue G in Chicago. Regular hours of the museum are 1:00 to 4:00 PM on Thursdays and from 12:00 to 3:00PM on the first Sunday of the month. Materials may be donated to the museum or they can be copied and returned to their owner. Please help us to fill in the gaps in the history of our community.

#### **Cultural Pluralism or Assimilation?**

The remaining pages of this booklet briefly pose the question whether ethnic groups maintain separate identities or lose their ties to the "old world" and become Americans. Is America a "melting pot" where ethnic differences diminish over time (assimilation) or, as some suggest, a "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic" made up of different entities which retain their individual characteristics while creating a composite which is different from its component parts (cultural pluralism)? You be the judge.

## Ethnic Organizations and Activities

All ethnic groups created organizations and activities which helped them to maintain their cultural traditions and connections to their places of origin. Photographs of ethnic clubs and organizations on Chicago's Southeast Side follow.



Croatian Falcons  
(Harvatski Sokol) 1924



Ogniwo Polish National Alliance  
1933



Karageorgevich Lodge No. 25  
Serbian Fraternal Group 1912



Gayety Theater  
Showed Spanish films



Roman Knights Clubhouse  
Italian Club from South Deering



Kompare's Tavern Catered to  
Croatians and Slovenians



Mexican Independence Day Parade  
1957



Mexican Patriotic Club Dinner  
1962

## Americans All

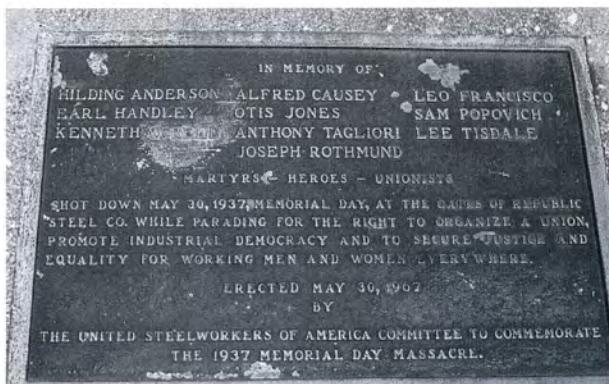
At the same time ethnic and religious groups were trying to maintain the culture, customs, and traditions of their homeland there were forces which "Americanized" them. All of these forces did not affect all groups in the same manner or to the same degree. But all groups were changed by the new land. Different ethnic groups came together in the workplace and in the unions which developed out of common concerns as workers. They also came together in the marketplace where they all purchased the wonderful variety of goods available in their new home. They often banded together for political purposes seeking the election of candidates who would respond to their concerns. And perhaps most importantly, they came together to defend their new homeland when it was threatened by enemies from abroad. The following images reflect this process of change.



**Employment Office at Illinois Steel  
Sign in 6 Languages**



**Workers at Pressed Steel in Hegewisch  
Liberty Bond Rally, 1918**



**Memorial Day Massacre Commemorative Plaque  
Names of Multi Ethnic Victims**



**Workers Join Together to Fight for Rights  
1956**

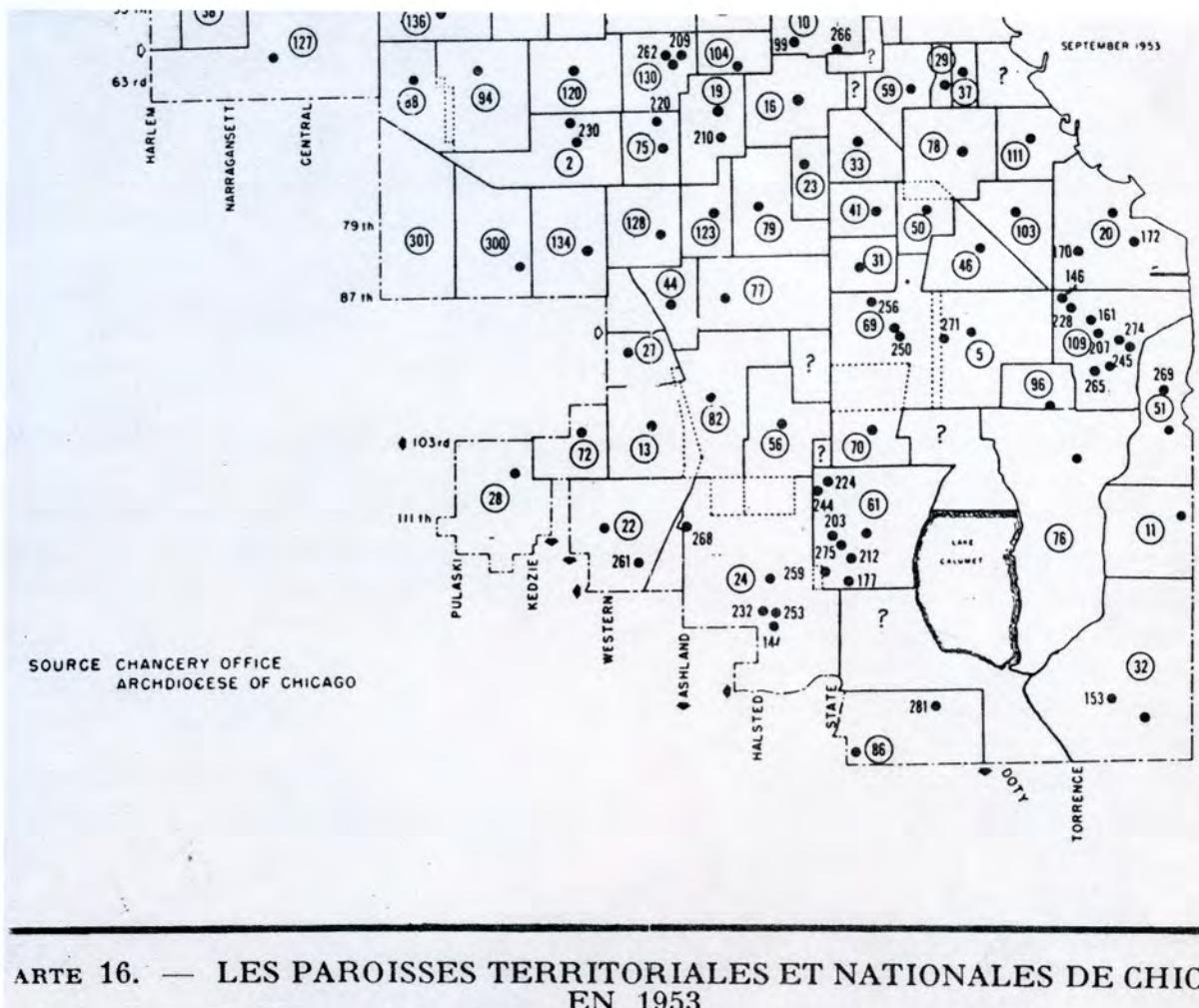


**"Rosie the Riveter" Group at South Works  
during WWII**



**Vietnam Memorial and Mural at  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish**

## Territorial and Ethnic Parishes of the Catholic Church



**ARTE 16. — LES PAROISSES TERRITORIALES ET NATIONALES DE CHICAGO EN 1953**

The Catholic Church in Chicago established two types of parishes. The territorial parish had specific territorial boundaries and were typically set up for English speaking Catholics, usually Irish Catholics. As other Catholic ethnic groups came to the city, the Archdiocese set up nonterritorial, national or ethnic parishes for Catholics who spoke other languages. Prior to the Vatican II Council, the mass was said in Latin in all Catholic parishes but sermons, church bulletins, catechism books, and social events were usually conducted in the native language of the parishioners. The map shown above was created by a French priest from Montreal, who was doing post graduate research on Chicago Catholic churches. It reflects the location of the national or ethnic parishes within the boundaries of the territorial parishes of the Southeast Side. On the Southeast Side, St. Patrick (109), St. Kevin (76), St. Columba (32), St. Francis De Sales (51), St. Bride (20), Annuciata (11), and Our Lady Gate of Heaven (96) were territorial parishes. Immaculate Conception (161), Sts. Peter and Paul (207), St. Michael (172), St. Joseph (228), St. George (269), St. Florian (153), St. John the Baptist (245), St. Mary Magdalene (170), Sacred Heart (265), Our Lady of Guadalupe (274), and St. Bronislava (146) were ethnic or national parishes.

### Concluding Thoughts

This booklet is only one outcome of a Cultural Institutions Project by the Museology Program during the 2001-2002 school year. A very successful tour was conducted for the Cultural Connections Program on May 18, 2002. Materials were added to the Southeast History web site ([www.neiu.edu/~reseller](http://www.neiu.edu/~reseller)). The Project gathered and organized materials relating to community churches. These materials are on file at the Southeast Historical Museum located in the Calumet Park Field House at 9801 S. Avenue in Chicago. A 2003 historical calendar with more recent photos of the churches in this booklet is planned. The Southeast Historical Museum continues to acquire historical materials relating to the history of this community. If readers have any materials which they would like to donate or loan to the museum for copying, please contact the museum. Regular museum hours are 1:00-4:00 PM on Thursdays and the first Sunday of the month from 12:00 to 3:00 PM.