

West Chatham Historic District
North, 79th Street; South, 82nd Street; East, Perry Avenue; West, Stewart Avenue

Originally an un-inhabited swampy area of South Chicago, West Chatham began to flourish as a bungalow neighborhood in the 1920's. During the first three decades of the 20th century Chicago's South Side experienced a rapid growth of working class residents. After the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition the South Side became a desirable area to live in with its proximity to Jackson Park (former site of the 1893 exposition) and the Illinois Central Railroad which supplied many jobs to the area at the time. Both played significant roles in making the South Side a desirable area for not just the middle class but also the wealthy, especially after the construction of the South Shore Country Club. With a playground for the wealthy and a booming industry for the middle class the South Side became a very desirable residential neighborhood.

The boundaries of West Chatham are West 79th to the north, South Perry Avenue to the east, 82nd Street to the south and South Stewart Avenue to the west. Within these boundaries are 347 buildings, 281 of which are Chicago Bungalows built between 1914 and 1930. There are also 39 multi-family units most of which are brick 2 flats. Unlike many other neighborhoods in Chicago, West Chatham is a district made up of mostly single family units that catered to the rising population of working class people and incoming immigrants seeking the American dream.



The development of West Chatham was part of the natural progression of growth in the South Side. With the main draw being the industrial boom in industries such as steel and the import/export industry. Wentworth Avenue, with its wide median at 79th and 82nd, was the location of the spur-track connection for the Chicago Surface rail lines (CSL) and later the location of its successor the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA). This area of Wentworth Avenue was once used to accept inbound shipments of transit supplies, streetcars, and some buses. The spur at 79th also connected the shops along Wentworth with Western Indiana Railway south of 83rd street. Streetcars ran up and down this major thoroughfare until 1958 when they were discontinued. The track remained intact until the late early 1980's when it was removed entirely. Having industries such as the Chicago's CSL/CTA was one of the many desirable reasons to live in West Chatham.



In many bungalow neighborhoods there is often a major contributing architect who gives each neighborhood its own unique stamp. West Chatham was no different. Ernest Baucher was the architect for roughly a third of the Chicago Bungalows built in the West Chatham neighborhood, while F.A. Fielder brought an Art Deco twist, which set S. Yale Avenue apart from the rest of West Chatham. Some distinctive features of the bungalows built in this neighborhood are flat or polygonal bays with side entrances, low-pitched, hipped roofs, and brick and limestone detailing on the facades. Bungalows constructed toward the end of the building boom in the mid 1920s show more elaborate brick detailing and patterning than the earlier bungalows built in the area.

