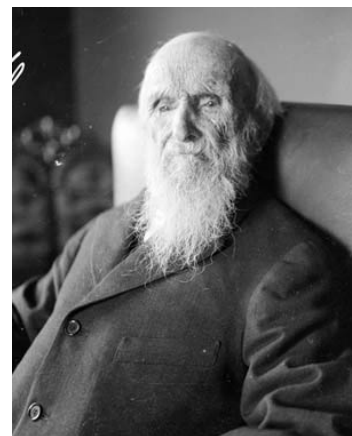


## Falconer Bungalow Historic District

The Falconer Historic District sits on land that was originally owned and farmed by Scottish immigrant Laughlin Falconer. The land was open prairie when Falconer settled there in the mid-1800s—by the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area had been transformed into a thriving mixture of industrial, commercial, and residential. More than anything else, what distinguishes the bungalows that sprang up between the two northwest extensions of the Chicago, Minneapolis and St. Paul during the 1910s and 1920s is the fact that they were not segregated from the industrial and manufacturing districts where many of their residents worked—they were in the thick of it. The very conditions that many potential bungalow owners were eager to escape—a patchwork quilt of urban fabric that kept residential and industrial development in close proximity—worked to the advantage of builders and buyers in Belmont Cragin. Developers in the Falconer district were building homes within walking distance of major area employers like the W. F. Hall Printing Company and Lyon & Healy, manufacturers of pianos, organs, and musical instruments. Such a concentrated existing industrial infrastructure did not hinder the development of bungalow neighborhoods in Belmont Cragin; instead, it helped to fuel residential construction in the area.



**Figure 1: Laughlin Falconer (Chicago Daily News, 1911)**



**Figure 2: 4900 Block Oakdale**

Home building in the Falconer district initiated in November of 1915, when Edward H. Olsen & Henry Van Vooren began work on a series of bungalows on the 4900 block of West Oakdale Avenue. Although Olson and Van Vooren were the first, it was George C. Hield, a former hay dealer from Wisconsin who had moved to Chicago in the 1890's to work in real estate, who was by far the most important player in the growth of the Falconer district. Hield purchased nearly all of the land subdivided by the Falconer family between 1913 and 1919 with the intention, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, of building “about thirty houses of various designs, including single dwellings of the ordinary type, bungalows, and two flat buildings to cost no less than \$2500.”

During the first five years of construction, from November 1915 to April 1921, only three of the 101 homes built in the district were constructed by builders other than Hield (working with architect Ernest Braucher) and Olsen & Van Vooren (with architect Johan Knudson). These five men had shaped residential development in the area around the Falconer School during those years. After 1921, however, the floodgates opened and dozens of developers, builders, architects, and potential homeowners flocked to fill the remaining lots. 240 properties were built in the Falconer district between 1921 and 1925, eighty-seven in 1923 alone.

The ready availability of manufacturing and clerical jobs in the Belmont Cragin community meant that a good number of bungalow owners in the Falconer district housed extended family or adult children who maintained jobs outside the home and likely made contributions to the household economy. This sort of living situation was especially advantageous as the financial difficulties of the depression set in during the early 1930s. The bungalow at 4938 W. Oakdale Avenue was one example—Norwegian-born Nels Bae worked as a piano tuner at Lyon and Healy, a musical instrument factory on Fullerton Avenue. His oldest son, Henry, worked as a pattern maker at a clothing factory, while 19-year-old son, Howard, found work as a file clerk with an electric parts manufacturer. Despite the proximity to major industrial and manufacturing concerns, the strict residential boundaries of the Falconer district were as effective as any bungalow neighborhood in creating a very different world for bungalow owners to return home to. They came to share very similar brick bungalows in a quiet residential landscape that depended upon, but was emphatically set apart from, their worlds of commerce, industry, and labor.



**Figure 3: 4938 Oakdale**