

## Community History: *Lincoln Square*



**Loading Dirt Train at the North Shore Channel Near Bowmanville, 1909**

*Image DN-0054510, Chicago Daily News negative collection, Chicago Historical Society*

during the time period, and therefore provided income to numerous farmers in the vicinity.

Bowmanville was established in 1850 by Jesse Bowman. Although his claim to the land was later found to be illegal, it did not prevent the area from developing into a bustling settlement. The area became a stopping point for farmers delivering their goods to markets in Chicago. Numerous saloons and taverns sprang up, among them an establishment owned by Hiram Roe, located on Roe's Hill. The name of the area was later misspelled Row's Hill and Rose Hill, which became the name of a train depot in the community. The name eventually

became Rosehill, as it stands now in the name of a burial ground—Rosehill Cemetery.

Ravenswood was developed in the late 1860s, with the formation of the Ravenswood Land Company in 1868. A number of neighborhood streets bear the names of founding members of the Ravenswood Land Company, among them Leland, Wilson and Kedzie.

Significant settlement in the Lincoln Square area did not occur until the annexation of the area by the city of Chicago. This, coupled with the arrival of the streetcar lines, facilitated the development of the community. During the time period between 1910 and 1920, the population of the area nearly doubled. The majority of residents traced their origins to Germany, Sweden,

The area today known as Lincoln Square is actually composed of several earlier communities. The communities included in this area are Budlong Woods, Bowmanville, a section of Ravenswood, Summerville, and Winnemac. Earliest settlement of the area by non-native peoples began in the 1850s and 60s. These settlers were immigrants from England, Germany and Luxembourg who worked as truck farmers.

Budlong Woods traces its origins to the Budlong brothers, Lyman and Joseph, who constructed a pickle factory in the area in 1857. The factory was a significant economic fixture in the area, as it was the primary supplier of both pickles and pickled beets to the Chicago area



**Chicago & Northwestern Railway Station and Tracks Alongside Arched Gateway at Rosehill Cemetery, October 29, 1907**

*Image DN-0005316, Chicago Daily News negative collection, Chicago Historical Society*

Poland, or Luxembourg. Concurrent with this increase in population, there was a boom in residential construction. To the west of Lincoln Avenue, a number of brick bungalows, large apartment buildings, and two- or three-flat buildings were erected. To the east of Lincoln Avenue, the residential structures were older, with frame structures being more common. Along the north branch of the Chicago River, a number of brick single-family houses were constructed.

The community continued to grow through the 1920s, reaching a population of over 46,000 in 1930. The most numerous nationalities remained German or Swedish, while a number of Italians, Russian Jews, and Greeks began to move to the area. Industrial development of the area was also strong during the period, as evidenced by the construction of a number of light manufacturing facilities along the train tracks in Ravenswood.



**Children Shoveling Snow in Front of Water School, 1918**  
*Image DN-0069544, Chicago Daily News negative collection,*  
*Chicago Historical Society*

Sharon Wiesenmayer has lived in the Lincoln Square community her entire life and has occupied her current residence in the area for nearly 40 years. She has seen many changes in that time, much of that in development and changes in daily life.

Sharon recalls a vast amount of open space north of Foster Avenue. She remembers that there was once a stable on the northwestern corner of Berwyn and Western Avenues, where the general public could ride horses. The current location of the Burger King on the southern side of Lawrence Avenue was, at one time, a victory garden, and a popular play spot for neighborhood kids. She recalls that there was one water spigot for the entire plot of land, and that people were welcome to take what they

wanted from the garden as long as they did some work in exchange. “It was a great way for city kids to learn about agriculture...where things come from,” she explains.

Another popular diversion for kids was the movie theaters. She recounts a number of theaters in the vicinity. “There were a lot. There was the Nortown, the Terminal at Damen and Irving Park, the Davis, the Bug, the Riviera, the Uptown...,” she explains. “My parents would give me 25 cents...15 cents would get you into the film and the remaining 10 cents would get you two treats—they cost 5 cents each,” she adds. The building which today houses Degerberg Academy was at one time the Bertha Theater. She recalls that each year in December, they would host a Christmas party for children, which was always very popular and quite crowded.

Sharon recalls that children spent a lot of time playing in the parks, as well. She remembers Welles Park for its outdoor wading pool and playground equipment. “They probably weren’t very safe but they were a lot of fun,” she declares. “There were the ‘high-flyers’, ‘daddy long legs’, and the wooden swings.” She also recalls that once annually there were “Well Baby Clinics” held in the park. “All the mothers would go with their children for inoculations and such,” she recollects.

Sharon recalls the significance of Lincoln Avenue to the daily life of residents. “In those days, many women stayed at home. Since there weren’t the refrigerators and things we have today, they went shopping every day. They called it ‘going to the Avenue’.” She remembers

that every summer, on Lincoln Avenue, the businesses held what they called ‘Dollar Days’. “It was so crowded...the sidewalks were just full of people.”

Sharon remembers a number of other businesses that have changed or disappeared. The building which now houses the Chicago Brauhaus was at one time a furniture store, in which residents could pay their utility bills free of charge. “The owner of the store was a man named Fred B. Snite and he had a son who was stricken with polio,” Sharon recalls. Consequently, the boy was confined to an iron lung. Nonetheless, his father made efforts to include his son in festivities in Lincoln Square when he could. Sharon also recalls the Jürgens bakery across from Welles Park, where she and her cousins would occasionally be treated to freshly baked dinner rolls. “We used to scour the neighborhood for hangers and bottles. We could cash these in at the sundry shops,” she says. “On the corner of Western and Leland, where there is now a liquor store, used to be Vahles Pet Store and they specialized in birds. Just south of there was a sundry shop where we could cash in the bottles and just south of there was a cleaners where we could sell the hangers.”

Her memories include places more typically reserved for adults. On the northwestern side of the community, “there used be a place called ‘Two-Ton Hank’s Roadhouse’,” she remembers. “About ten feet north of the Western Avenue CTA station used to be Jimmy Lynch’s tavern. It was a low brick building and behind it was the one-and-a-half story frame house where Jimmy and his family lived.” She describes Jimmy as friendly Irish man with a thick brogue. “It was the place all the men stopped after work. That was when the turnaround for the Green Hornets was right there,” she says. The Green Hornets, she explains, were a sort of streetcar or trolley driven by a motorman without the aid of a conductor. They were very sleek and modern and they were silver with green accents, hence their name.

Although the community of Lincoln Square has changed through the years, it still retains a number of ties to its past. Recollections such as those of Sharon Wiesenmayer are invaluable to help residents of today understand their community—its origins, how it once was, and even how it will be.