Historic Intersection of 59th and Halsted Streets

Address: 59th and Halsted Streets
- 5855 S. Halsted Street (N.E. corner building)
- 5901 S. Halsted Street (S.E. corner building)
- and 5900 S. Halsted Street (S.W. corner building)

Architect: Unknown

Date: c. 1890 (Northeast corner building)
- c. 1890 (Southeast corner building)
- c. 1885 (Southwest corner building)

CHRS Rating: Not rated

National Register: Not Listed

Threat:
In June, 2005, a Planned Development was approved by the Chicago Plan Commission that would demolish and redevelop the stretch of commercial buildings on both sides of Halsted Street from 59th Street to 61st Street. This Planned Development was endorsed by Alderman Shirley Coleman. The plan was created by the Englewood Commercial Development Corporation (ECDC) an entity formed by a group of area merchants and landowners. The ECDC worked with Smithfield Properties, the Department of Planning and Development, Chicago-based Booth Architects, and with the office of Alderman Coleman to create the plan. Of the buildings listed above, the southeast corner building and the southwest corner building would be demolished as part of this plan. The northeast corner building would remain but would be placed at great risk for eventual demolition as well.

Through a campaign called “The Vanishing Urban Corner,” begun in 2001, Preservation Chicago has opposed the demolition of vintage Chicago corner buildings. In 2002, the Recommendations for the New Zoning Ordinance of the City of Chicago, published by the City of Chicago stressed the importance of preservation of the vintage corner buildings that anchor our city's neighborhood commercial districts. This philosophy is being ignored by City of Chicago planners in the plan for 59th and Halsted Streets.

We recognize Alderman Coleman's efforts to make the 20th Ward beautiful, economically stable, and safe. The preservation of beautiful historic buildings at 59th and Halsted should be part of this process. Painful experience has shown that "clear cutting" of beautiful older buildings in Englewood is not the way to achieve neighborhood rebirth. We respect the efforts of the ECDC and Smithfield Properties to create a plan for the rebirth of this part of Englewood. However, they are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The vintage corner buildings can serve as an elegant gateway to the new shopping district and offer a setting that cannot be offered elsewhere on the South Side.

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As Alderman Coleman has said about the Planned Development, “We think that these retailers will...also draw shoppers from outside of the neighborhood, and that will boost our economy.” Saving the three corner buildings is entirely consistent with that vision. There is a chance to renew this intersection in a way that creates a beautiful, one-of-a-kind neighborhood centerpiece. The restoration of pre-1900 commercial buildings should not be limited to neighborhoods in Lincoln Park. There is a great potential for the restoration efforts on the South Side as well, and at no place is that more evident than at 59th and Halsted Streets.

**Fulfillment of Landmark Criteria:**

**Integrity:**
The buildings on the northeast corner and southeast corner each have intact corner turrets and intact cornices of serrated pressed metal projections above the roofline. The masonry is without major exterior cracks. At the southwest corner, there is reversible alteration of the projecting bay windows of and a loss of the cornice. These projecting bays can be restored and the cornice can be reconstructed. Thus, all three buildings possess enough integrity to qualify for landmark designation.

**Significant Architecture:**
The northeast corner building and the southeast corner building are each constructed in a Queen Anne Style with ornate cylindrical corner turrets. These are intact corner turrets and intact cornices of serrated pressed metal projections above the roofline. The southwest corner building has an Italianate style that was typical in the late 1800’s with some Queen Anne influences, such as the projecting bays.

**Critical Part of the City’s Heritage:**
The intersection of 59th and Halsted Streets tells the story of the early days of Englewood. This community was created as a separate town from the City of Chicago. Englewood was originally part of the Town of Lake. In 1880, Englewood was primarily a town of Irish, German, and Scottish residents. Englewood was annexed into the City of Chicago in 1889, the year in which electric streetcar service was initiated on both 59th Street and on Halsted Street. By 1890, the population had swelled. Englewood of the early 1890’s is colorfully portrayed in the recent bestseller “Devil in the White City” by Erik Larson. Redevelopment of the intersection of 59th and Halsted was undertaken, with solid buildings of high architectural quality rising on all four corners of the intersection.

**Unique Visible Feature:**
To our knowledge, this is the only commercial intersection on the entire South Side that possesses three intact corner buildings that were constructed in the 1800’s. Too many historic buildings have been demolished in the recovering areas of the South Side. At 59th and Halsted Streets, the three corner buildings create a unique visual feature that can serve as a drawing card. The “mirror image” buildings on the northeast corner and southeast corner form a beautiful gateway along 59th Street and serve as bookends to the intersection. Meanwhile, the imposing older and larger building at the southwest corner survives as one of the oldest commercial buildings in Englewood, dating from the 1880s.