

Schulze Baking Company Building

40 E. Garfield Boulevard, Chicago



Upper façade Wabash Avenue, Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard.

Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

OVERVIEW

The Schulze Baking Company Plant has served as a Washington Park visual landmark for over a century, from its prominent location at the corner of East Garfield Boulevard and South Wabash Avenue. Designed by prominent architecture firm John Ahlschlager & Son, the five-story bakery is clad in cream and blue terra cotta and glazed brick, which lends the building a hygienic and modern appearance. The 1914 construction of the Schulze Plant and the implementation of cutting edge and highly efficient technology bolstered the company's production to 150,000 loaves of bread a day. This flagship baking plant made Schulze Baking Company a part of Chicago's rich food production history and synonymous with quality bread.

Schulze Baking Company Building

Address: **40 E. Garfield Boulevard**

Architect: **John Ahlschlager & Son**

Date: **1915**

Style: **Sullivan-esque**

Neighborhood: **Washington Park**



Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

The Schulze Baking Company Plant has been closed since 2004. Although plans for the adaptive reuse of the structure as a data center were announced in 2015, the building has remained unoccupied for almost a decade and is now for sale. The exterior and interior of the building has slowly decayed due to vacancy. Full restoration and adaptive reuse of this historic structure would provide a bright future for the Schulze Baking Company Plant.

HISTORY

The Schulze Baking Company was established by Paul Schulze Sr. in 1896. Schulze immigrated from Germany in 1883, and spent his first decade in the United States working in retail and commercial positions between South Dakota and Minnesota. By the 1890s, as a new Chicago resident, Schulze innovated a new process of breadmaking that addressed many of the health and inconsistency issues that challenged the breadmaking industry.

The process of breadmaking in the City of Chicago was often inconsistent and even dangerous occasionally. As detailed in a 1915 Chicago Tribune ad: “Mrs. Jones bought one kind of a loaf in her neighborhood, while Mrs. Smith, a few blocks away, got an entirely different product [...] Truly, in those days, bread was an ‘unusable staple.’ The big majority of housewives baked their own bread [...]” It is reported that after he interviewed housewives about the shortcomings of bakery bread in the city, Schulze decided to establish a new bread product that would be

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Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

on Sullivanesque motifs, the gleaming ornament lends crisp, rich detail to the industrial building, especially in the entablature around its Garfield Boulevard entrance and its highly-elaborate corner cornices. The company's name is emblazoned in blue terra cotta lettering on each side of the building's cornice, establishing the brand's presence in the Washington Park community and making the structure an iconic visual landmark of South Side Chicago. In the years following the building's completion, its terra cotta designs were such a triumph that Midland Terra Cotta Company featured them prominently in numerous advertisements.

The building's cream, glazed exterior was designed to visually convey the modernized and hygienic facilities contained within. Newspaper advertisements emphasized that the quality bread exclusive to Schulze was the result of the plant's scientific baking—"terrific heat perfectly regulated." A 1911 speech by Schulze to the National

of a reliable quality. Schulze Baking Company rapidly became a local favorite thanks to their consistent production standards and ingredient selection. The company's Butter-Nut Bread was particularly representative of the high-quality loaves that Schulze sought to produce.

Following the company's growing success, the construction of the Schulze Baking Company Plant was announced in February 1913. The new five-story warehouse housed enough machinery to produce 150,000 loaves of bread a day, enabling the increase of Schulze's production. Designed by John Ahlschlager & Son, the building was erected using a reinforced concrete frame and clad with glazed white brick. The building's façade is trimmed with blue and cream terra cotta ornament created by the Midland Terra Cotta Company, one of the biggest terra cotta manufacturers during the early part of the twentieth century.

The terra cotta on the Schulze Plant is some of the most ornate for a factory building in the city of Chicago. Drawing

The baking plant celebrated its grand opening in April 1915. The event was reported to have 10,000 guests in attendance and was accompanied by press announcements applauding the bakery's mechanical might and

THE CHICAGO DAILY TRIBUNE, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1911.

Paul Schulze
PRESIDENT SCHULZE BAKING COMPANY

How Schulze Solved Chicago's Bread Problem

*A Little Story
of a Big Success*

William Schulze
TREASURER AND
DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION
SCHULZE BAKING COMPANY

Twenty

years ago the bread-eaters of Chicago may have been wondering how the city was to be supplied with bread. The city was then a small town, and the bread was made by a few small bakeries. The city was then a small town, and the bread was made by a few small bakeries. The city was then a small town, and the bread was made by a few small bakeries.

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Paul Schulze's "Vision" was the first step in the solution of the bread problem. He saw the need for a large bakery, and he set out to build one. He saw the need for a large bakery, and he set out to build one. He saw the need for a large bakery, and he set out to build one.

personal investigation of the needs of the bread market. He understood the needs of the bread market. He understood the needs of the bread market. He understood the needs of the bread market.

The Right Start

Through the beginning and middle of the century, the bread market was a small one. It was a small one, and it was a small one. It was a small one, and it was a small one. It was a small one, and it was a small one.

And it was. In the Chicago market, the bread market was a small one. It was a small one, and it was a small one. It was a small one, and it was a small one.

Schulze had made immediate friends in the bread market. He had made immediate friends in the bread market. He had made immediate friends in the bread market.

Welcomed by Housewives

But its great success was in the fact that it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success.

It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success.

The Ideal Combination

Paul Schulze was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision.

He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision.

He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision. He was a man of vision, and he was a man of vision.

Then came Schulze's "Butter-Nut Bread," which was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success.

When Butter-Nut Came

And with the coming of Butter-Nut Bread, Schulze's popularity reached its peak. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success. It was a success, and it was a success.

Today, twenty years later, the Schulze Baking Company is still a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

"More Bread for Health's Sake"

Leading Chicago physicians and food scientists are unanimous in their praise of good living. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

which made it necessary to build the new house at 55th St. (Gerald Blvd.) and Wabash Ave.

"The City of Cleanliness"

"The City of Cleanliness" is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

Prove for Yourself

It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success. It is a success, and it is a success.

Schulze Fine Baking Products Include —
Schulze Butter-Nut Bread
Schulze Big Dandy Bread
Schulze Bran-Raisin Bread
Schulze Rye Bread
Schulze Pan Dandy Bread
Schulze Luxury Cake
And Eighteen Other Fresh-from-the-oven Delights

SCHULZE BUTTER-NUT BREAD

Schulze's New 200,000 South Bakery at 55th St. (Gerald Blvd.) and Wabash Ave.

Image credit: Chicago Daily Tribune, Nov 3, 1915, Page 9

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Wabash Avenue elevation, Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Son, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer

technological advancements. The Schulze Company Baking Plant's forward-thinking approach to breadmaking was identified by an automatic system of weighing flour and water, and the use of gas-heated ovens, which eliminated sooty exhaust. A three-story garage at 21-25 E. 54th Street, architecturally a scaled down version of the main baking plant, was erected and put into operation at the same time.

The Schulze Baking Company was reconfigured over the years. By 1939, the company had become the Schulze & Burch Biscuit Company and soon after was contracted by the U.S. Army for wartime manufacturing. Schulze & Burch later debuted the Flavor Kist product line in 1949 and spent the following decades creating beloved new snack products including Toast'em Pop Ups and Flavor Kist saltines. Schulze & Burch Biscuit Company also pioneered the first mass-produced granola bar in the 1970s.

Today, the Schulze Baking Company Plant is one of the most notable and recognizable buildings in the Washington Park community. It was recognized for its architectural and cultural significance in 1982 with listing on the National Register of Historic Places but has not yet received Chicago Landmark status. After nine decades of operation, the plant was closed in 2004 and has remained vacant ever since.



*"From this palace all white, comes the Bread that's all right - Schulze's Butter-Nut Bread Postcard. Schulze Baking Company Advertisement.
Image credit: Preservation Chicago Postcard Collection*

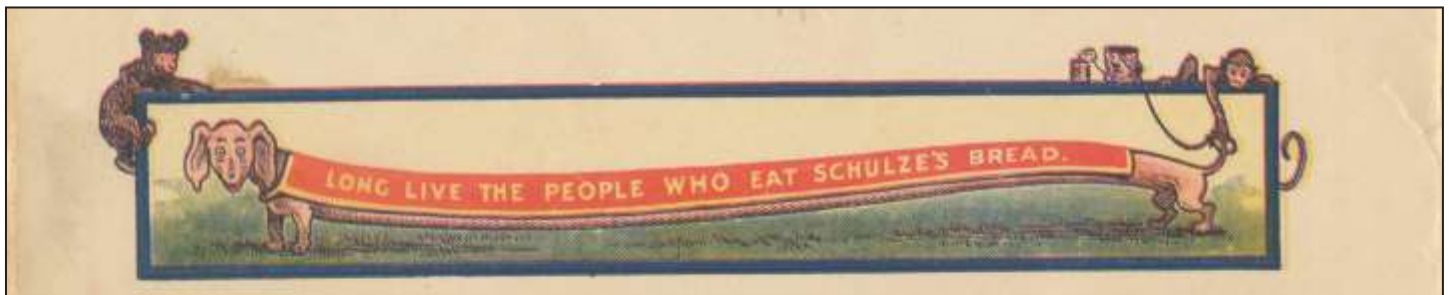
THREAT

In 2015, property owners 1547 Critical Systems Realty announced that they would be converting the Schulze Baking Company Plant into a data center. The company announced a planned investment of \$130 million, promising “a much needed capacity the Chicago market requires as well as jobs to the area.” The data center was proposed to reuse the entirety of the plant building while using the later additions along Wabash as a training complex for data center workers. At the time of the proposal’s announcement, restoration of the terra cotta facade was estimated to take between two and five years before the data center could be fully operable.

Three years later in 2018, the property was reportedly acquired by real estate investors CIM Group for \$7.5 million and the estimated cost for a data center conversion were raised to \$150 million. Six years after the acquisition, the building remains vacant and largely untouched. In January 2024, the Schulze Baking Company Plant was once again listed for sale.

Protective scaffolding has been erected around the perimeter of the structure since its closure, and the installation of tarping around the building has raised new concerns about the condition of the terra cotta exterior. In the time since the data center proposal’s announcement, a large garage and storage structure featuring similar glazed brick and terra cotta was demolished nearby, alluding to a potential redevelopment plan.

A preservation-friendly owner is not guaranteed. Without Chicago Landmark designation, the Schulze Baking Company Plant could be heavily altered or even demolished without recourse by a new owner. The structure is orange-rated in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, offering it only the protection of a 90-day demolition delay review. After a decade of disuse, any further vacancy will only worsen the building’s condition and its terra cotta exterior.



Sammy Schulze of Schulzeville Children's Book, Paul Schulze, 1911. Image credit: Preservation Chicago Collection gift of Debbie Mercer

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preservation Chicago is fully supportive of the proposal to convert the Schulze Baking Company Plant into a data center, or any other viable reuse that may yet emerge. Marketing materials for the current listing encourage the use of the site as a data center, advertising its proximity to a ComEd station and other data centers. Given its large, open floor plates and sturdy warehouse construction, a data center or similar programming is a sensible use for this structure. Other uses, such as housing, retail, or commercial space for small businesses, would all suit the Schulze Baking Company Plant's design, honor this important building, and demonstrate an investment in Washington Park.

However, it is imperative that the building receive Chicago Landmark protection for its ornate terra cotta and glazed brick exterior. Schulze Baking Company and its focus on hygienic food production, Ahlschlager's

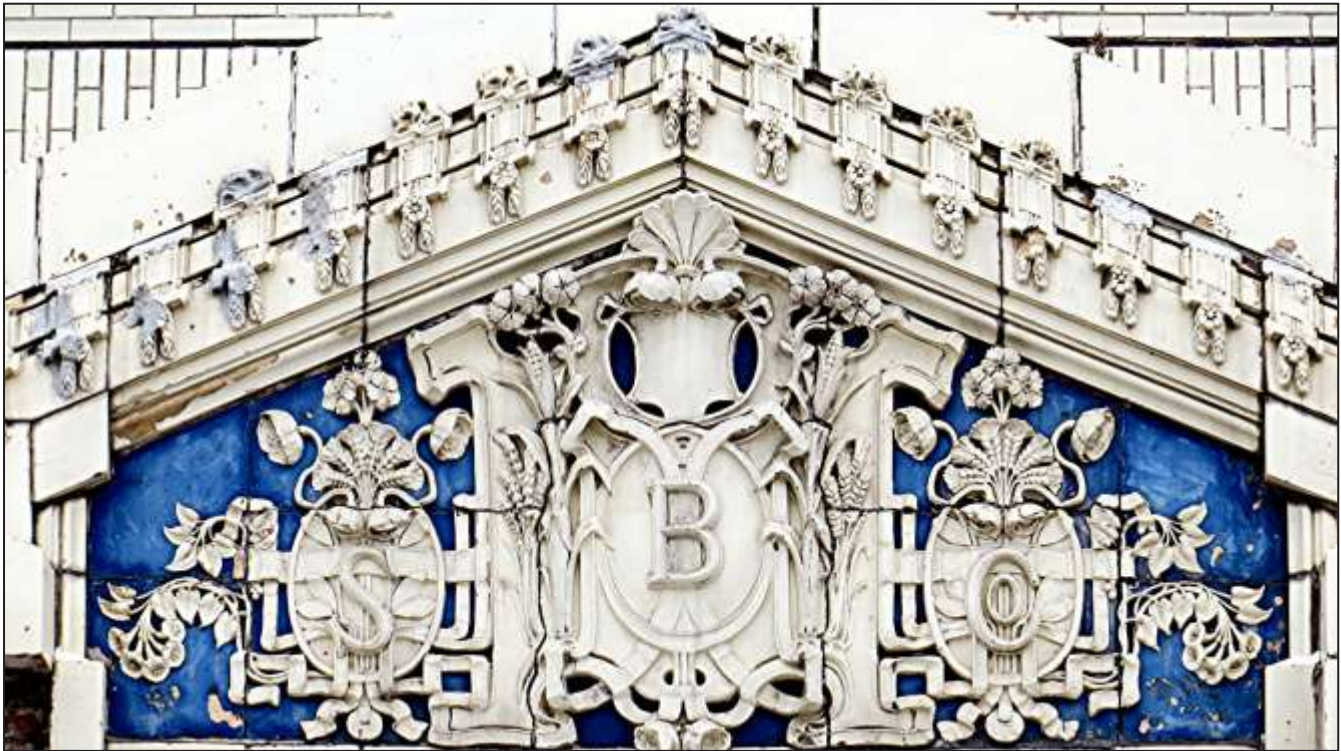


"The Bakery where bread is made of the highest standard of quality and production - Schulze Baking Company" Schulze Baking Company Advertisement c. 1919. Image credit: University of Illinois Library Digital Collections Open Content Alliance

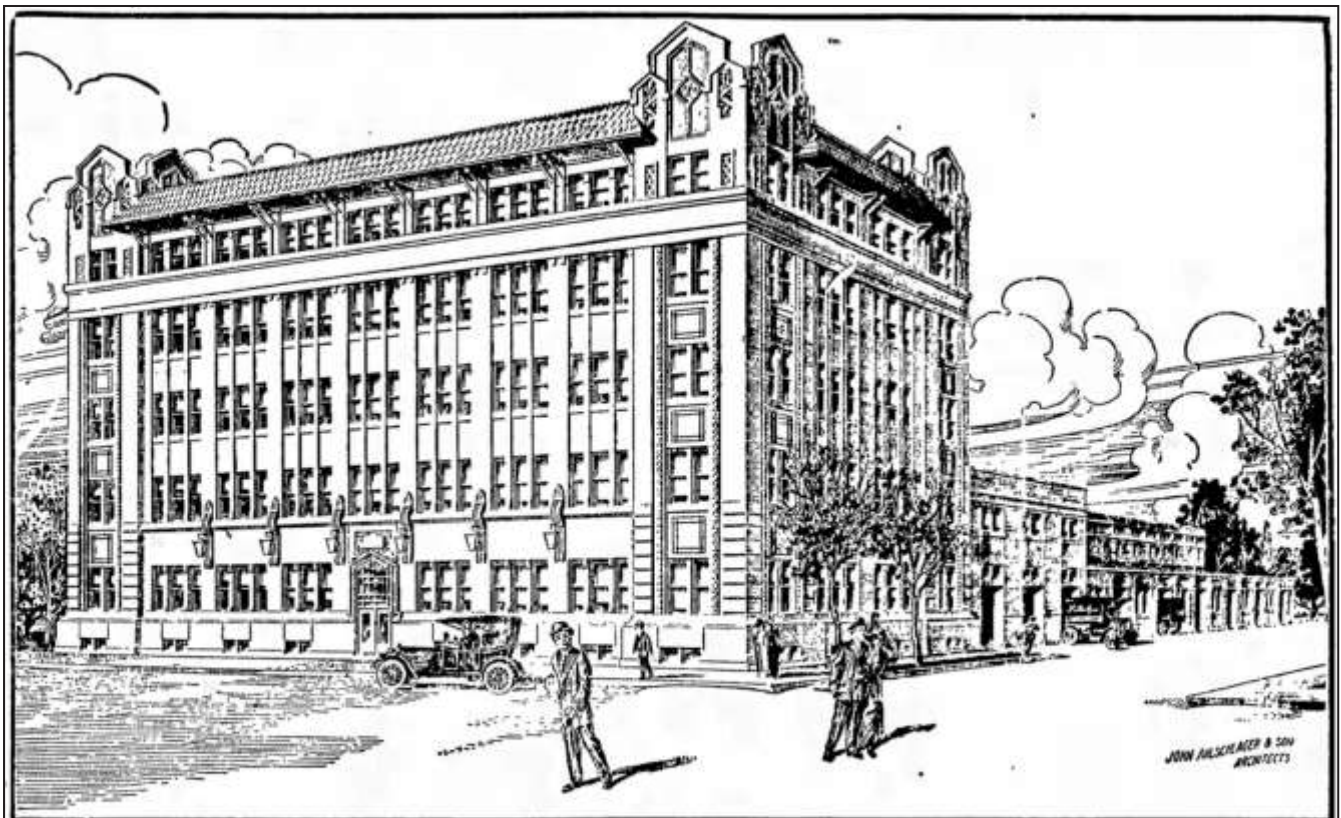
architectural talents, and Midland Terra Cotta Company's craftsmanship are all important narratives intertwined with the plant's powerful visual appearance. To lose building's exterior features would mean losing the ability to convey much of the site's significance.

Landmark status would be a benefit the new owners in their efforts to renovate the building and encourage restoration of existing and missing terra cotta including the corner cornices and roof cresting. Once Landmark status is secured, permit fees are waived and the site is made eligible for substantial Adopt-a-Landmark funds, both of which would contribute to a more cost-efficient restoration and reuse of the Schulze Baking Company Plant. These financial benefits, along with potential tax credits provided by the building's National Register status, are all at the disposal of the site's new owner should they pursue Chicago Landmark designation.

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Schulze Baking Company Building Ornament Detail, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer



The Schulze Baking company will start work soon on an immense bakery building to be erected at Garfield Blvd. and Wabash Ave., at a total cost of \$250,000. The building will be equipped with all modern baking facilities, and will have a capacity of 150,000 loaves of bread a day. Particular attention will be given to secure the most sanitary working conditions in the building. The structure will be five stories in height and will front 170 feet on Wabash Ave. The exterior of the building will be of an attractive appearance. It will be faced with white enamel tiling. A large garage and stable will be erected at 54th St. and Wabash Ave. on a lot 135 by 165 feet in extent. It is expected the structure will be completed by November. The plans for the building were prepared by John Ahlschlager & Son.

Schulze Baking Company Building Drawing. Image credit: Suburbanite Economist Chicago, February 14, 1913, page 3



Garfield Blvd. elevation, Schulze Baking Company Bld., 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers



Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Son, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Historic photo credit: The Western Architect

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West façade, Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Ward Miller



Interior view, Schulze Baking Company Building Interior, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer



North façade, Schulze Baking Company Building, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 40 E. Garfield Boulevard. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers



Schulze Baking Company Building Garage, 1914, John Ahlschlager & Sons, 21 E. 54th Street . Photo credit: Debbie Mercer