

Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor

Roughly 4200 to 4500 S. Western Boulevard, Chicago



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4301 S. Western Boulevard, Illinois Fibre Specialty Co, 1920. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer

OVERVIEW

Eight historic industrial buildings line the eastern edge of South Western Boulevard between 43rd and 45th Street within Chicago's Back of the Yards/New City neighborhood. Together, these early 20th century factories and warehouses exemplify several architectural styles of the period, were designed by notable industrial architects, and form an intact industrial corridor. South Western Boulevard forms the western boundary of Chicago's Back of the Yards/New City neighborhood, a historically industrial and working-

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Addresses: **Roughly 4200 to 4500 S. Western Boulevard**

- i. **4235 S. Western - MK Cabinet Supply**
- ii. **4301 S. Western - Illinois Fibre Specialty Co.**
- iii. **4311 S. Western - Whitney Ford**
- iv. **4335 S. Western - Kinsella Landscaping Building**
- v. **4401 S. Western - Wheatland Tube / Cold Parts**
- vi. **4425 S. Western - Wheatland Tube / American Plumbing**
- vii. **4435 S. Western - Wheatland Tube**
- viii. **4501 S. Western - O Cedar Corp.**

Architects: **Various**

Dates: **c.1910-1920**

Neighborhood: **Back of the Yards / New City**



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4335 S. Western Blvd., Kinsella Landscaping Building, 1916, Argyle E. Robinson. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer

class area associated with the former Union Stock Yards. The eight industrial properties face the boulevard to the west with the former Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific Railroad running parallel to the east.

This industrial corridor is one of only a handful of such intact clusters along the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District, which was listed in the National Register in 2018. All eight of the industrial buildings included in this group listing are contributing resources to the historic district. Two of the buildings (4345-4349 S. Western Boulevard. and 4501-4513 S. Western Boulevard.) are identified as orange-rated in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey* (CHRS). One building, (4405 S. Western Boulevard.) is also identified as individually eligible for listing in the National Register in the *Historic and Architectural Resources Geographic Information System* (HARGIS), maintained by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Preservation Chicago is taking a proactive preservation advocacy position. The inclusion of these eight industrial buildings along South Western Boulevard on our Chicago 7 Most Endangered list serves to spur increased awareness, promote advocacy, and encourage greater appreciation for Chicago's industrial heritage citywide. By 1919, at which time most of the buildings on this list were built, half of the city's 400,000 wage-earning workers were employed in heavy industries. The factories and warehouses throughout Chicago, including these buildings along Western Boulevard, tell the city's rich history of labor, industrialization, and Midwestern manufacturing, a story that remains important not only to the region, but to the nation and its growth.

HISTORY

South Western Boulevard began as part of the original South Park System, established in 1869 by the South Park Commission. The boulevard extends 3.1 miles north from Garfield Boulevard in Gage Park to the Sanitary and Ship Canal, with a width of 200 feet. It was constructed just east of the existing South Western Avenue, which had been laid out as a plank road in the 1850s. A broad central median separated the two parallel roadways, forming a paired boulevard-and-avenue configuration that remains today. The eastern roadway became known as South Western Boulevard, while the western retained the name South Western Avenue. When first developed, the east side of the boulevard was lined with residential flats and modest commercial buildings. By the early 20th century, however, these were gradually replaced by heavier industrial development. The completion of the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal in 1900, along with the convergence of several major railroads, made the area highly desirable for factories

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Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4235 S. Western Boulevard, MK Cabinet Supply, 1919. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

and warehouses in this area, as manufactured goods could be efficiently shipped to and from Western Boulevard by both water and rail.

The buildings are generally two-to-four-story red brick masonry buildings with large, evenly spaced rectangular window openings to allow sufficient natural light and ventilation. Some of the buildings are more utilitarian in their design with modest brickwork and stone elements, while others feature slightly more ornamental stone or terracotta elements. Several of the buildings also feature rooftop ventilators, a common feature of historic industrial buildings where the circulation of fresh air was paramount. Two of the buildings (4301 and 4425 S. Western Boulevard.) still retain original metal rooftop water towers, an increasingly rare feature in Chicago that is a vestige of fire suppression policy following the Great Fire of 1871. The building at 4335 S. Western Boulevard Also preserves its original clay tile roofing system, the standard fireproof roofing system of the early twentieth century.

Several buildings also retain historic signage that conveys the original or later occupants, such as the Bell & Thorn bronze signage (inset into the limestone pediment) surrounding the entrance to 4235 S. Western Boulevard; the limestone tablet above the entrance to 4311 S. Western Boulevard that reads “Whitney & Ford,” the terracotta “G” medallion at the parapet of the building at 4425 S. Western Boulevard (for the “Grinnell Company”), and the limestone tablet above the entrance to 4501 S. Western Boulevard that reads “O-Cedar Corp’n” (for the O-Cedar Corporation).

INVENTORY: 4235 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: United Autographic Register Co. (c. 1919); Bell & Thorn Inc. (c. 1951)

Current Occupant/Use: MK Cabinet Supply

Construction Date: 1919

Style: Craftsman

Architect: Unknown

The United Autographic Register Company built the warehouse and office building at 4235 S. Western Boulevard in the 1910s. The company manufactured autographic registers and other machines that could produce commercial paperwork such as receipts, bills, orders and purchasing, and other reports more efficiently. Its subsidiaries included Autographic Register Company and Hamilton Autographic Register Company. The stockroom was housed on the first floor and offices were located on the second floor. By 1951, a Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows that the building was in use by Bell & Thorn Inc., a metal stamping and tool and die manufacturer. By this time, masonry additions had been built to the north along South Western Boulevard and to the east along W. 43rd Street to provide additional warehouse space and a larger area for manufacturing.



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4301 S. Western Boulevard, Illinois Fibre Specialty Co, 1920. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

INVENTORY: 4301 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: Cleveland Metal Products Co. in 1920; Solar MFG Co. in the 1940s, and Inland Steel Products Co. (c.1951)

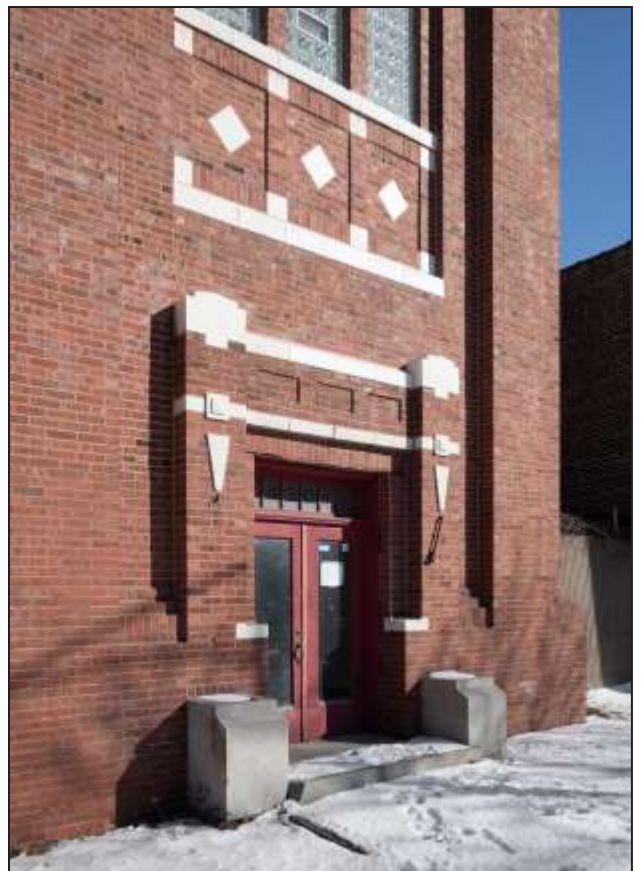
Current Occupant/Use: Illinois Fibre Specialty Co.

Construction Date: 1920

Style: Craftsman

Architect: Unknown

4301 S. Western Boulevard was built in 1920 by the Inland Steel Products Company. The company was founded in Chicago by Joseph Block and his son in 1893. After it built a new large open-hearth steel mill in Indiana Harbor, the company grew exponentially in the first two decades of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, the company made two percent of all the steel produced in the United States. This building was used as a warehouse to store sheet metal products manufactured at the company's plants. Railroad tracks historically led to a wooden platform at the southern facade of the building, allowing for the efficient shipment of steel products to and from the warehouse for storage, distribution, or sale.



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Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4311 S. Western Boulevard, Whitney & Ford, 1921. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

INVENTORY: 4311 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: Whitney & Ford (c. 1921)

Current Occupant/Use: Several, including Chase Mechanical, Designs for Dignity, and Windy City Booths

Construction Date: 1921

Style: Craftsman

Architect: Unknown

According to the 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, the building at 4311 S. Western Boulevard was built by Whitney & Ford in 1921 as a warehouse for plumbing supplies. The company, organized by Hugh E. Whitney and Charles A. Ford, was a plumbing fixture manufacturer that produced enameled cast iron fixtures such as bathtubs, lavatories, kitchen sinks, laundry trays, drinking fountains, and similar items. The north half of the building was a train shed, and, like most of the buildings along the east side of Western Boulevard, siding tracks once directly entered the east side of the building to support the efficient shipment of fixtures to and from this address

INVENTORY: 4335 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: Union Petroleum Co. (c. 1919); Sinclair Refining Co. (c. 1951)

Current Occupant/Use: Kinsella Landscaping Building

Construction Date: 1916

Style: Classical Revival

Architect: Argyle E. Robinson



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4335 S. Western Boulevard, Kinsella Landscaping Building, 1916, Argyle E. Robinson. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

The warehouse facility at 4335 S. Western Boulevard was built by the Union Petroleum Company in 1919, an export auxiliary of the Sinclair Consolidated Oil Company involved in the manufacturing and refining of oils. The first floor housed shipping rooms, tank storage spaces, and shops, while the second floor housed storerooms, offices, and employee areas. The land to the north of the building was historically used as a barrel storage yard. Railroad tracks once led to the yard to the north, as well as a steel-and-clay-tile, fireproof platform along the southern facade to facilitate shipment.

4335 S. Western Boulevard was designed by Chicago architect Argyle E. Robinson, as documented in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey*. Robinson was born in 1872 and trained at the Armour Institute of Technology (now Illinois Institute of Technology) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He went on to design residences in Hyde Park as well as apartment buildings, warehouses, and industrial buildings throughout the city. He was appointed City Architect from 1926 through 1929 during which time he designed four Chicago firehouses, all of which have since been designated as City of Chicago Landmarks.

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Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4401 S. Western Boulevard, Wheatland Tube / Cold Parts, 1914, Samuel Scott Joy. Photo credit: Serhii Chucky / Esto



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4425 S. Western Boulevard, Grinnell Co., 1916, Argyle E. Robinson. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer

INVENTORY: 4401 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: Waterous Acme Co. (c.1914) Wilson & Co. Warehouse (c. 1919); Coffee Corporation of America (c. 1951)

Current Occupant/Use: Wheatland Tube / Cold Parts

Construction Date: 1914

Style: Craftsman

Architect: Samuel Scott Joy

4401 S. Western Boulevard was constructed in 1914 as a four-and-one-half-story building with a nine-story corner tower. It was originally used by Wilson & Company, a Chicago-based meatpacking company, as a warehouse. By 1919, the company was also involved in the manufacturing, canning, and preserving of jellies, jams, and other fruit and vegetable products, which were stored at this warehouse. By 1951, this building was in use by the Coffee Corporation of America, which performed coffee roasting, packing, storage, and shipping from the facility.

INVENTORY: 4425 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: Grinnell Co.

Current Occupant/Use: Wheatland Tube / American Plumbing

Construction Date: 1910s

Style: Tudor Revival

Architect: Unknown

This factory building at 4425 S. Western Boulevard was built by the Grinnell Corporation in the 1910s, a company associated with engineer Frederick Grinnell. The company provided pipe fitting and plumbing services. Grinnell also patented a design for a new fire protection sprinkler system in 1881, which eventually was installed in thousands of buildings around the country. This building housed the company's local pipe fitting and manufacturing in the 20th century.

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INVENTORY: 4435 S. Western Boulevard

Historic Name/Association: James A. Brady Foundry Co. (c. 1919); Wolff Range Boiler MFG. Co. (1920s); Service Station Equipment Co. (1930s); John Wood Manufacturing Co. Inc. (c. 1951)

Current Occupant/Use: Wheatland Tube

Construction Date: 1910s

Style: Classical Revival

Architect: Unknown

4435 S. Western Boulevard was built in the 1910s and operated by the James A. Brady Foundry Company, which also operated a plant in the nearby Central Manufacturing District. The company manufactured metal castings, and this building housed a foundry, core department, and cleaning department, as well as offices, warehouse and storage space. By 1951 the building was in use by John Wood Manufacturing Co. Inc., which continued to manufacture metal products on site. By this time, an addition was built along the north facade, and the building housed a boiler shop, galvanizing shop, tank storage, and shipping and loading spaces, with extended railroad sidings.



INVENTORY: 4501 S. Western Boulevard

Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4435 S. Western Boulevard, Wheatland Tube / James A. Brady Foundry Co., 1910s. Photo credit: Serhii Chucky / Esto

Historic Name/Association: O-Cedar Corporation (former Channell Chemical Co., c. 1920); Russell Electric Co. (Division of Raytheon Manufacturing Co., c. 1951)

Current Occupant/Use: 555 International (an interior design, fabrication, and management firm)

Construction Dates: 1920

Style: Chicago School, Classical Revival

Architect: Davidson & Weiss

O-Cedar Corporation was originally founded in Chicago as Channell Chemical Company by Charles A. Channell in 1906. The company originally manufactured wood polishes and waxes, and later expanded its products to include a greater variety of cleaning products, such as mops, brooms, and sponges. The building at 4501 S. Western Boulevard was constructed in 1920 for the O-Cedar Corporation. By 1951, the building was in use by Russell Electric Company (at that time a division of Raytheon Manufacturing Co.). The company was established in 1914 and manufactured heating and ventilation equipment. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the company was involved in manufacturing fractional-horsepower electric motors.



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4501 S. Western Boulevard, 555 International / O-Cedar Corporation, 1920, Davidson & Weiss. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

The building was designed by architects Frank E. Davidson (1867-1931) and John W. Weiss (1868-1938) of Davidson & Weiss. The pair formed a brief partnership in 1916 and designed many industrial manufacturing and warehouse facilities throughout Chicago until dissolving their business in the mid-1920s. Davidson continued to practice architecture independently.

THREATS

While all of the industrial buildings along S. Western Boulevard are contributing resources to the National Register-listed Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District, many buildings require repair or rehabilitation to address deferred maintenance and deteriorated conditions. Most of the buildings retain their original windows and doors; decorative masonry, stone, and terracotta elements; clay tile roofing; water towers; and more. While these important features remain, their conditions vary, and some buildings exhibit greater deterioration than others.

In addition to their condition, some of the industrial buildings along S. Western Boulevard are partially unoccupied or currently available for lease or sale. In 2025, demand for industrial space such as this clearly has evolved, though a number of these structures continue light industrial and warehousing functions. Despite their centrality to Chicago's industrial growth and economic development, many of these industrial properties are primed for alternative, non-industrial uses.



Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4501 S. Western Boulevard, 555 International / O-Cedar Corporation, 1920, Davidson & Weiss. Photo credit: Serhii Chrucky / Esto

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preservation Chicago encourages existing owners of occupied industrial buildings along S. Western Boulevard to continue promoting the occupation and use of these warehouse and factory buildings for income-producing, industrial purposes. Wherever possible, Preservation Chicago implores existing owners of occupied buildings to make much-needed repairs and rehabilitation efforts in a manner that preserves the existing historic features.

Where the buildings are partially unoccupied, for sale, or for lease, Preservation Chicago supports future property transactions or leases that maintain the historic character and use of the properties, or that propose suitable adaptive reuse and rehabilitation.

While two of the buildings (4335-4349 S. Western Boulevard and 4501-4513 S. Western Boulevard) are identified as orange-rated in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey and therefore protected by the 90-Day Demolition Delay Ordinance adopted in 2003, the remainder of the buildings are not safeguarded by such legislation. Preservation Chicago recommends the designation of this significant and intact cluster of industrial buildings as a City of Chicago Landmark District, which would provide important protections against any future threats including alterations that destroy their distinct character.



Entry details, Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4501 S. Western Boulevard, 555 International / O-Cedar Corporation, 1920, Davidson & Weiss. Photo credit: Serhii Chucky / Esto



Entry details, Western Boulevard Industrial Corridor, 4311 S. Western Boulevard, 4259 S. Western Boulevard, and 4425 S. Western Boulevard. Photo credit: Debbie Mercer