Community Area #44
Chatham

Population: 30,779
Number of Structures: 7,336
Avg. Date of Construction: 1935

 Significant Structures: 60

Source: 1990 Census, Harris File, CHRS

(Dots show approximate, rather than specific, locations of significant structures.)
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Located on Chicago's South Side, Chatham was originally swamp. Its first non-native development came with the Illinois Central railroad, which laid tracks along the community area's eastern boundary in the 1850s and built corn cribs along those tracks, between 75th and 95th streets, in 1860.

Chatham's first residences, however, were not built until the 1880s, when several frame homes were built in the so-called "Avalon Highlands," actually a swamp, southeast of 79th and Cottage Grove. Another early settlement sprang up during the same years in the community's northwestern section.

Chatham was annexed to Chicago in 1889. That same year, the Dauphin Park subdivision was platted. Located between 87th, 93rd, Martin Luther King Drive, and the Illinois Central tracks, Dauphin Park, also known as Chesterfield, attracted railroad workers. Streetcar service along Cottage Grove was in place by 1892, but development remained predominantly along the Illinois Central line for another 20 years.

After 1910, the Avalon Highlands began to develop in earnest as hundreds of homes were built. A significant real estate development during this decade was the "Garden Homes," located along Indiana, Michigan, and Wabash, between 87th and 89th. Commissioned by businessman and philanthropist Benjamin J. Rosenthal, the "Garden Homes" development was the first privately-built, low-income housing project in Chicago. It was modeled after early 20th-century English planned suburbs, with brick single-family houses and stucco-clad duplexes designed by Charles S. Frost.
In 1920, the 79th Street station on the Illinois Central railroad opened, initiating development of the surrounding area with bungalows and other single-family homes that continued throughout the decade. Apartment buildings were constructed in the years before 1930, with handsome, Tudor Revival-style examples at 1015 E. 82nd (1928), 8153 S. Ellis (1928) and 8200 S. Ellis (1929). Also of interest is the terra cotta-clad commercial building at 7900 S. Cottage Grove (1925; Kocher & Larson) and the Arthur Dixon Public School at 8300 S. St. Lawrence (1928). Much of the area's residential growth was spurred by workers employed by newly established factories along the western edge of the community area, located between 83rd and 87th.

Development in Chatham quickened during the 1940s with the settlement of a 100-year old land dispute that finally allowed development of land bounded by 83rd, 87th, Cottage Grove and St. Lawrence. The 550-unit Chatham Field Housing Project was erected on the site. The community continued to develop as a middle-income residential community, buttressed by large manufacturing concerns, through the 1960s and 70s.

The focus of the Chicago Historic Resources Survey was on buildings erected prior to 1940. Buildings and developments erected after that date generally are not included in the inventory.
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Survey information for this community area was accurate at the time it was first surveyed in September 1987.
For an explanation of column headings, see page III-1.