Community Area #56
Garfield Ridge

Population: 33,948
Number of Structures: 11,251
Avg. Date of Construction: 1954

Significant Structures: 4

Source: 1990 Census, Harris File, CHRS

(Dates show approximate, rather than specific, locations of significant structures.)
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Community Area # 56

Garfield Ridge

Garfield Ridge lies at the far west side of Chicago. Formerly known as Archer Limits, the community takes its current name from Garfield Boulevard (55th Street), which runs through its center, and from an ancient beach ridge on the west side of the community.

As early as the 1830s, construction of Archer Road and the Illinois & Michigan Canal brought workers into the northeastern portion of the community, as did the laying of the Chicago & Alton Railroad in the 1850s. Few people chose to settle in the swampy area, however. Among those who did was real estate magnate "Long John" Wentworth, whose farmstead stood on what is now the 5400 block of South Harlem Avenue. Archer Avenue cut across Wentworth's land, just south of his home, which has since been demolished.

In the 1880s, railroad expansion stimulated land speculation in what is now Garfield Ridge. Chicago annexed the area between Cicero Avenue and the Beltline tracks in the northeast corner of the community in 1889, and some small frame cottages were built on this unimproved land. Nevertheless, Garfield Ridge remained mostly prairie and swampland until well after the turn of the century.

Around 1910, nearby industrial development prompted subdivision of land in the community's west and northeast sections. Here, workers built inexpensive, single-family frame cottages. One unusual example stands at 5548 South Nordica.

5540 S. Nordica Av.
In 1915, Chicago annexed the southern sections of the community west of Cicero, but residential development continued to be concentrated east of Cicero. When the city annexed additional land in the northeast corner of Garfield Ridge in 1921, a small retail area developed at the corner of Cicero and Archer Avenues.

During the 1920s, Midway Airport was built on vacant land in the southeast corner of the neighborhood. By 1930, much of Garfield Ridge, though subdivided, was still undeveloped. Rapid transit connections were few: only the Archer Avenue streetcar line connected the community with Chicago's central business district. What homes were built were largely one-story, single-family brick or frame cottages. Commercial development along Archer Avenue also continued.

Garfield Ridge grew slowly, but steadily in the 1930s and 1940s, as surrounding industries continued to expand. Significant new residential construction occurred in the western portion of the community. This development necessitated the construction of the Michael M. Byrne Public School at 5321 South Oak Park in 1936.

In 1950, the Chicago Housing Authority completed construction of the LeClaire Courts public housing development at the corner of 44th and Cicero. The Trans World Airlines Hanger at Midway Airport, a fine example of modern architecture, was built at 5035 W. 55th in 1953. In addition, a substantial amount of residential construction continued in Garfield Ridge through the 1950s, especially in the eastern portions of the community.

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 1984.
For an explanation of column headings, see page III-1.