

## *HISTORIC LANDMARK AWARDS*

### **Ardmore Historic Landmark District**



In 2004, the Ardmore Historic District was awarded a Historic Landmark plaque by the Villa Park Historic Preservation Commission to recognize its significance to the Village of Villa Park. These buildings represent such an important part of Villa Park's heritage and history and its future. This district is located in the center or heart of the community.

On June 10, 1910, the subdivision of Ardmore, named after a Philadelphia suburb, was formed. This area included streets, alleys, and 345 lots. In 1914, it was incorporated with the Villa Park subdivision and was named Ardmore.



Then in 1917, the name was changed to Villa Park. This business district grew around the former Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railroad at the Ardmore Avenue stop. Real estate developers brought people out on excursion trains from the city to purchase lots and build homes in the surrounding area.

Early developers were Ballard and Pottinger, Charles Heisen, and Raymond Sears.



The majority of the district's commercial buildings were constructed in the late 1920s. The first business was Karnstedt's general store, built in 1910, which was located at 5 E. Park Boulevard.

In the early days, both the Jewel and National grocery stores were located here. There were several drug stores with soda fountains, a candy & dry goods store, bank, dairy, hardware store, men's clothing store, doctors offices, service station, bakery, dance studio, bike shop, record store, and a movie theater within this very busy and popular district.

The Ardmore Historic Landmark District consists of a variety of unique buildings, and now services the community and surrounding area in many ways. Included are the former Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Ardmore Avenue train station, built in 1910, which is now the home of the Chamber of Commerce and Information Center, gazebo, commercial buildings, beauty school, attorney offices, shops, taverns, funeral homes, Masonic Lodge, medical offices, library, schools, and churches. A seasonal market, summer concerts, and festivals are periodically held in this area.



This district is bounded by Princeton Avenue on the west, School Street on the north, Cornell Street on the east, and Highland Avenue on the south.

The Illinois Prairie Path (former CA & E electric train right-of-way) provides a landscaped parkway that separates the businesses on Park and Central Boulevards and connects to the Villa Historic Landmark District.

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At the turn of the century, an electric railway called The Aurora, Elgin and Chicago streaked across the prairie farmland. This land was owned by German farmers: the Cables, Meyers, Karnstedt and Biermanns. They had settled here in the 1850's and 1860's.

Two subdivisions sprang up - Villa Park in 1908 and Ardmore in 1910. Summit Avenue was the dividing line. In 1914, the two were incorporated as Ardmore. In 1917, the name was changed to Villa Park.

Two wealthy men, 'Colonel' J.L. Calhoun and Charles C. Heisen, figured prominently in the early development. The Wander Company of Bern, Switzerland opened its only American plant, Ovaltine, in 1917.

The population boomed in the 1920's. The Aurora, Elgin and Chicago Railroad was largely responsible for the rapid growth. Professional and business people were attracted to 'country' living. Buyers of lots were given inducements of 20 apple trees or 200 baby chicks. Schools were built, churches opened, community organizations were formed and a 5¢ newspaper was introduced. Members of the Women's Club gathered books in a little red wagon for a library.

In the 1930's, when many banks closed, the Villa Park Trust & Savings Bank survived. The village grew rapidly during the post World War II period. The population soared from 8,000 to its peak of 25,000 in 1965. New churches came, businesses flourished, parks were created and a beautiful new library was built.

Today, Villa Park provides a good life for its 22,517 residents. They enjoy a 'small town' atmosphere, excellent schools, outstanding police and fire protection, 'state of the art' paramedic service and exceptional recreational facilities. Transportation is good and health services are outstanding. Service clubs are very active.

Villa Park residents are comfortable with a wide variety of housing and convenient shopping. An active society enabled Villa Park to have both Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railroad stations placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Both railroad stations are located on the Illinois Prairie Path, a national Historic Trail. In 1988, Villa Park received the coveted Governor's Hometown Honorable Mention Award for their three year volunteer campaign to install ornamental memorial lighting on the Villa Park Prairie Path.

Business people and our community leaders continue to address problem areas in the village while planning for the future of Villa Park.

Villa Park Historic Preservation Commission — Photograph by Carol Marcus