



What's Out There[®]

Chicago



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Welcome to *What’s Out There*® *Chicago* organized by The Cultural Landscape Foundation® (TCLF)

This guidebook provides photographs and information about more than 30 examples of the region’s expansive cultural landscape legacy, many of which were featured in *What’s Out There Weekend Chicago*, October 4–5, 2025, two days of free, expert-led tours.

Originally populated by Native peoples—including the Council of the Three Fires (Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations)—the region was settled by the French in the late seventeenth century. In 1795 the American government acquired a parcel of land at the confluence the Chicago River and Lake Michigan, establishing a fort by 1808.

Incorporated in 1837 with the motto *Urbs in Horto* (City in a Garden), a little more than three decades later, voters elected to create the Lincoln, South, and West Park Commissions. Following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, the city rebuilt, expanding in all directions. After Chicago was selected as the location of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, architect Daniel H. Burnham was commissioned to manage the creation of the fairgrounds. He collaborated with noted architects and designers such as Richard Morris Hunt and Sophia Hayden to create buildings that would showcase Burnham’s vision for the exposition’s neoclassical “White City” and with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., to develop the grounds.

With Chicago’s population exceeding 1.5 million people by the turn of the century, the state legislature authorized the acquisition of additional parklands in 1899, and again in 1903. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett authored the *Plan of Chicago* (1906-1909), and Jens Jensen, O.C. Simonds, and Alfred Caldwell developed the Prairie Style to poetically interpret natural ecologies of the American Midwest. Various components of Burnham and Bennett’s plan were realized prior to the Great Depression, and following World War II, the city embraced Modernism. By the mid-twentieth century, the Chicago Park District managed more than 6,000 acres, which were extended across some 169 parks and boulevards.

Chicago’s cultural landscape continued to evolve in the second half of the twentieth century. Between 1989 and 2011, Mayor

Richard M. Daley’s efforts resulted in the development of new parks and open spaces and the revitalization of many of the city’s historic resources. Many of the city’s once-neglected areas have been similarly revitalized, such as Kenwood Gardens and The Wild Mile. Concurrently, in neighborhoods including Chinatown and Woodlawn, efforts have been made to introduce greenspace and improve connectivity to nearby natural and cultural amenities.

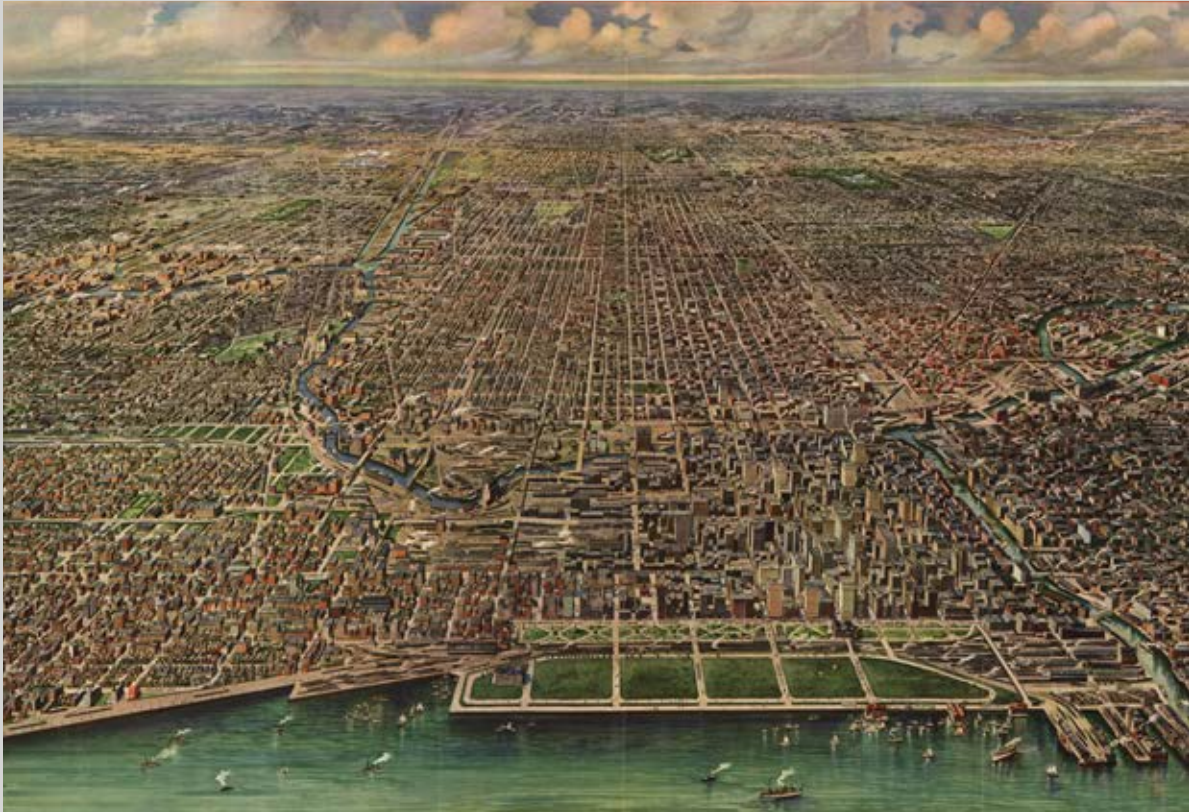
The guidebook, organized according to the city’s officially recognized “community areas,” is a complement to TCLF’s online digital *What’s Out There Cultural Landscapes Guide* to Chicago, which includes a history of the city and more than 70 site profiles, along with overarching narratives, maps, historic photographs, and biographies. This publication and the digital guide dovetail with TCLF’s web-based *What’s Out There* program, the nation’s most comprehensive searchable database of cultural landscapes. Profusely illustrated and carefully vetted, the database currently features more than 2,700 sites, 14,000 images, and 1,400 designer profile entries. *What’s Out There* has been optimized for mobile devices and includes *What’s Nearby*, a GPS-enabled feature that locates all landscapes within a given distance.

We owe a special word of thanks to all who participated in the creation of the guidebook and online guide. Likewise, we are grateful to the site stewards, volunteers, sponsors, and other friends of TCLF who made the guidebook and tours possible. We appreciate your interest in *What’s Out There Chicago* and hope you will enjoy experiencing the region’s distinctive and extraordinary landscape legacy.

Sincerely,



Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR
President + CEO, The Cultural Landscape Foundation



Arno B. Reincke, “Chicago, Central Business Section,” 1916. Image courtesy Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.



The Cultural Landscape Foundation® (TCLF)

TCLF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit founded in 1998 to connect people to places. TCLF educates and engages the public to make our shared landscape heritage more visible, identify its value, and empower its stewards. Through its website, publishing, lectures and other events, TCLF broadens support and understanding for cultural landscapes. TCLF is also home to the *Cornelia Hahn Oberlander International Landscape Architecture Prize*®.

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Humboldt Park

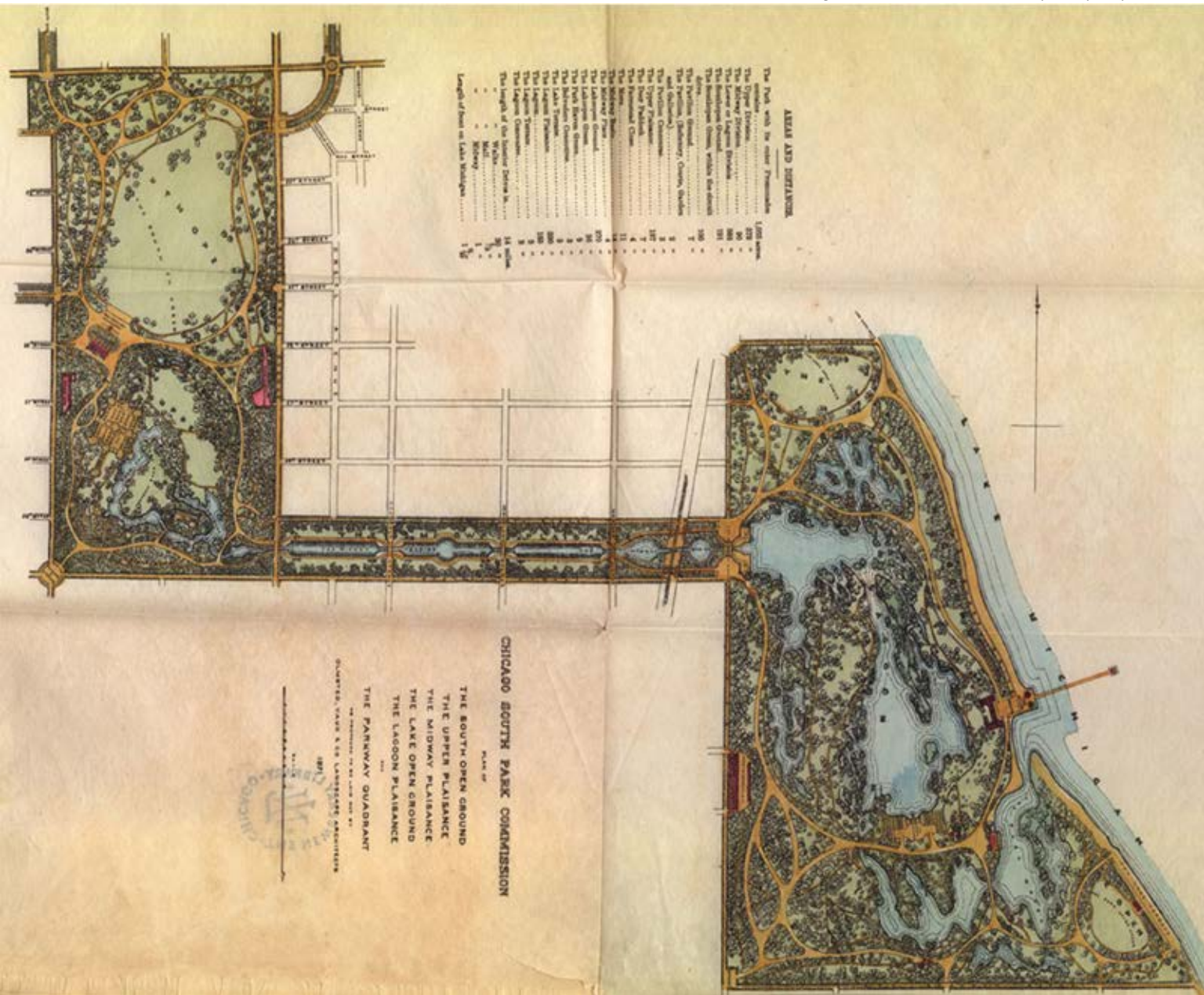
Photo by Eric Allix Rogers

List of sites

- 1 Chicago Riverwalk
- 2 Grant Park
- 3 Art Institute of Chicago, South Garden
- 4 Millennium Park
- 5 Lurie Garden
- 6 Cascade Park
- 7 Lake Point Tower, Skyline Park
- 8 The Wild Mile
- 9 Lathrop Homes
- 10 Lincoln Park
- 11 Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool
- 12 Graceland Cemetery
- 13 Logan Square Boulevards Historic District
- 14 The 606
- 15 Humboldt Park
- 16 Garfield Park Conservatory
- 17 Douglass Park
- 18 Columbus Park
- 19 Old Chicago Post Office
- 20 Chicago Women's Park and Garden
- 21 Ping Tom Memorial Park
- 22 Illinois Institute of Technology
- 23 Sherman Park
- 24 Washington Park
- 25 Midway Plaisance
- 26 University of Chicago
- 27 Promontory Point
- 28 Bronzeville-Black Metropolis National Heritage Area
- 29 Woodlawn
- 30 Jackson Park
- 31 Kenwood Garden

South Park System

Olmsted, Vaux & Co., Chicago South Park Commission Plan, 1871. Courtesy Newberry Library.



In 1869 Chicago's South Park Commission was established to oversee the development of boulevards and parks south of the Chicago River. One year later, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Calvert Vaux were hired to design the 1,055-acre system. The designers developed their plans around a series of water features that also included promenades, large gathering places, and intimate garden areas for what would later be named Washington Park and Jackson Park, connected by the Midway Plaisance. Unfortunately, their drawings were destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. A year later, the commission hired landscape gardener H.W.S. Cleveland to develop the system, although he was advised to minimize alterations to the land. While an economic recession led to further scaling back of the design, carriage drives, greenswards, picnic areas, a ramble, and elaborate floral displays were installed in Washington Park by the late 1880s. Jackson Park remained a marshy, unimproved area until the site was selected for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Olmsted and landscape architect Henry Sargent Codman, working with Daniel H. Burnham, developed grand designs for Midway Plaisance and Jackson Park. The former served as the exposition's amusement section and Jackson Park included the lagoons, islands, and promenades outlined in Olmsted and Vaux's original design.

In 1895 the state legislature approved the acquisition and improvement of additional lands for neighborhood parks. Ranging from less than one acre to nine acres, these active parks—some designed by Olmsted Brothers and D.H. Burnham & Company— included tracks, fieldhouses, and playgrounds. In 1934 all of Chicago's 22 park districts were consolidated and design work was thereafter developed in-house by the city.

Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, Jackson Park (1972), Washington Park (2004), and the Midway Plaisance (1972), were also designated in the multiple property listings in 1990 and 2018. The latter includes several contributing South Park System boulevards.

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Park System

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical
Picturesque

Designed by:
Edward H. Bennett
Daniel H. Burnham
H.W.S. Cleveland
Henry Sargent Codman
Olmsted Brothers
Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
John Charles Olmsted
Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot
Olmsted, Vaux & Co.
Calvert Vaux

Related Landscapes:
Jackson Park
Midway Plaisance
Washington Park

West Park System

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Park System

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Oscar F. Dubuis
William Le Baron Jenney
Jens Jensen

Related Landscapes:
Columbus Park
Douglass Park
Garfield Park
Humboldt Park

In 1869 the state passed legislation to create a new system of parks and boulevards in Chicago. Three park commissions—Lincoln, South, and West—were created to oversee this purpose. William Le Baron Jenney was hired as the first architect and chief engineer for the West Park System. In 1871 he produced preliminary plans for its three areas: North (now Humboldt) Park, Middle (now Garfield) Park, and South (now Douglass) Park, and a boulevard system to connect the West Park System with Lincoln Park and the South Park System. His plans included dense plantings, generous lawn areas, and facilities for passive and active recreation. Built on swampy land with few trees, each of these park designs called for the creation of picturesque vistas and the construction of lagoons to help with drainage. Jenney’s ideas were only partially executed because the Great Fire put on hold much of the parks’ development. Landscape engineer Oscar F. Dubuis added regional character to Jenney’s naturalistic park designs between 1878 and 1893. These regional elements were further developed when, in 1905, Jens Jensen became superintendent and landscape architect for all parks in the West system. Jensen redesigned the three original parks and designed and completed Columbus Park on land acquired in 1910—all in his characteristic Prairie Style. During his tenure he emphasized native materials and plants and utilized landscape elements to emulate naturalistic features, including “prairie rivers” and meadows.

Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, Humboldt Park (1992) and Garfield Park (1993) were also designated in multiple property listings in 1990 and 2018. The latter listing includes Douglass Park as a contributing resource. Columbus Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2003.

“Perspective of Prairie Drive: Looking North Toward Columbus Park,” in *A Greater West Park System*, pp. 36–37 (1920). Courtesy Charles A. Birnbaum.



Plan of Chicago

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Park System

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical

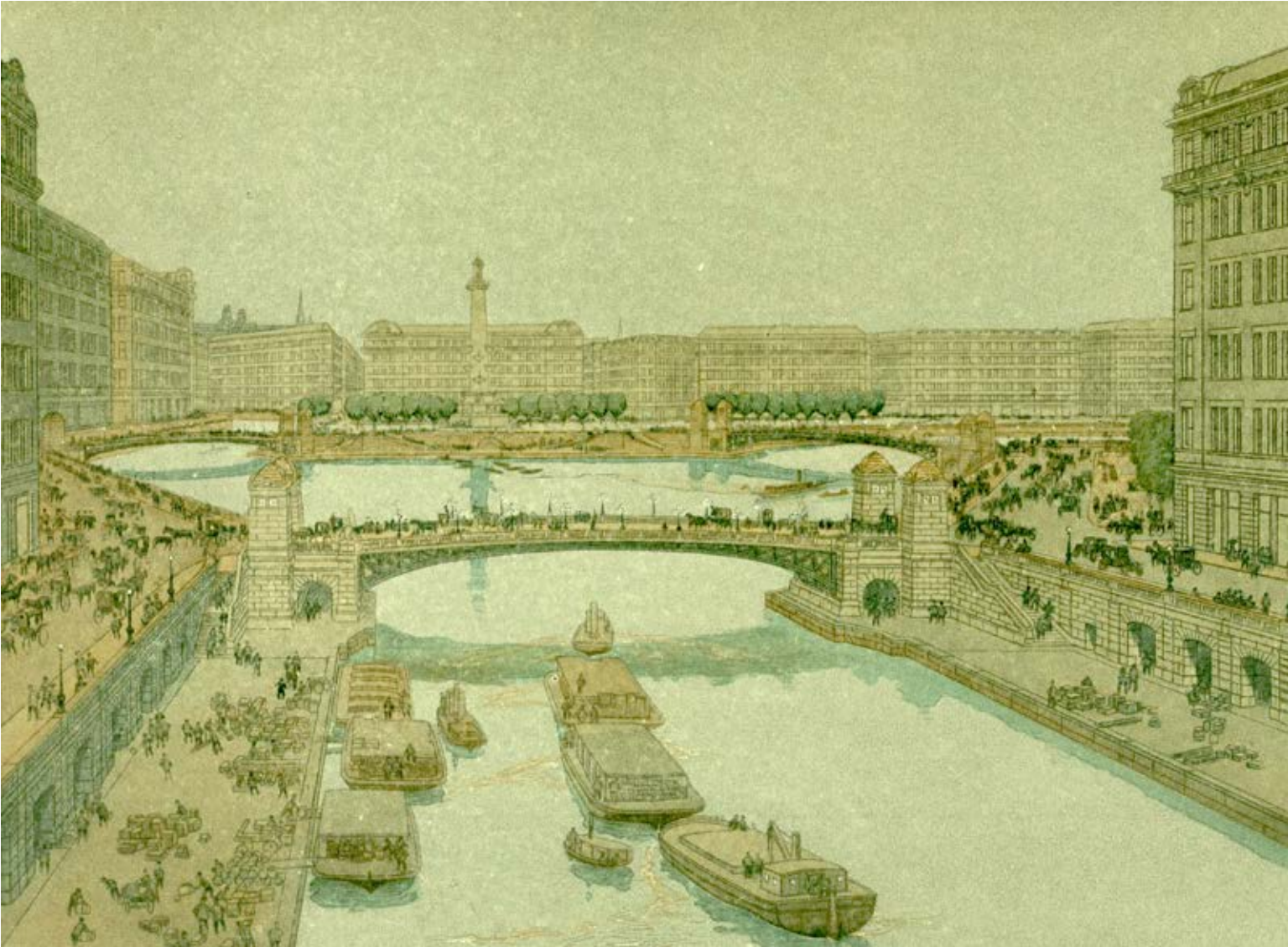
Designed by:
Edward H. Bennett
Daniel H. Burnham
D.H. Burnham & Company

Related Landscape:
Chicago Riverwalk
Grant Park
Old Chicago Post Office

Sponsored by Chicago's Commercial Club and drafted by Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett between 1906 and 1909, the *Plan of Chicago* (also known as the Burnham Plan), epitomizes City Beautiful ideals. The detailed plan exhibits Beaux-Arts principles of axuality and architectural monumentality on a metropolitan scale, which Burnham first employed at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Burnham's comprehensive vision advocated street widening, new parks, the reorganization of railroad and harbor infrastructure, and the erection of grand public buildings. Although only aspects of the plan were realized, Burnham's civic-minded design guided Chicago's planners throughout the twentieth century.

Because he considered Chicago to be an urban center in a larger region, Burnham's plan suggested arterial roads, a highway system, new railway terminals (of which only Union Station was built), and the straightening of the South Branch of the Chicago River. Parks, playgrounds, and natural areas were expanded, as was the boulevard system. Burnham recommended that parks on the shoreline be increased by infill, creating 25 miles of continuous open space. The improvements along Lake Michigan are the most recognizable achievements of the plan. These were often guided by Bennett, who was a consulting architect for the Chicago Plan Commission until 1930. The plan's vision for Grant Park as a grand, Beaux-Arts cultural center was realized in the 1930s, when Bennett's firm completed the *Clarence Buckingham Memorial Fountain* and land expansion led to the creation of a cluster of new museums and cultural institutions, now known as the Museum Campus.

Daniel H. Burnham, and Edward H. Bennett, after a rendering by Jules Guérin, pl. CVII from *Plan of Chicago* (Commercial Club of Chicago, 1906–1909). Courtesy Library of Congress.



Chicago Riverwalk

Historical Name:

Chicago River Park

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Neighborhood Park
Waterfront Development

Landscape Style:

Modernist

Designed by:

Jacobs/Ryan Associates
Joe Karr
Ross Barney Architects
Sasaki
Site Design Group
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Gary Tillery

Related Landscape:

Plan of Chicago

This approximately 25-foot wide, 1.25-mile-long linear park extends from Lake Michigan to Lake Street, paralleling the southern bank of the Chicago River. Nestled between the river's main branch and the Beaux-Arts viaduct of Wacker Drive, the waterfront park contains a continuous promenade with opportunities for commerce and recreation, as proposed in the *Plan of Chicago*.

The Riverwalk's history began in 1976 when landscape architect Joe Karr designed a section to pedestrianize and revitalize the two blocks between Wabash and Dearborn Streets. In 2001 the reclamation of the river for pedestrian use began in earnest, and the Riverwalk was extended from the lakefront to Michigan Avenue (2005). In 2009 the city commissioned Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) to prepare a framework plan; over the next seven years the city engaged several firms—including Sasaki, Jacobs/Ryan Associates, Site Design Group, and Ross Barney Architects—to complete the park.

With distinct segments defined by bascule bridges, the park is unified throughout by a continuous paved walkway that provides uninterrupted views of the opposite shore, with skyscrapers serving as a backdrop. Moving inland from Lake Michigan's shoreline, the walkway is framed by beds planted with birch and hackberry trees and is often flanked by docks. At Michigan Avenue, where the park curves to follow the course of the river, a Vietnam War Memorial Plaza is flanked by terraced steps and animated by a central fountain. The segments west of State Street interpret distinct landscape typologies including marina, cove, jetty, and riverbank. One, segment known as the "river theater," connects with Wacker Drive via a staircase and is distinguished by concrete stair-ramps, or "stramps," and rows of honey locust trees. Another, "the jetty," includes modest piers that extend into the river at various angles, supporting fish habitats.

In 2018 the segment between State to Franklin Streets, designed by Sasaki and Ross Barney Architects, received an Honor Award in General Design from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA).



Photo by Christian Phillips



Photo by Christian Phillips



Photo by Kate Joyce Studios

Grant Park

A monumental civic space fronting Lake Michigan, this approximately 319-acre park is sited on public land founded in 1835 and infill created from the detritus of the Great Fire. Known from 1847 as Lake Park, it was renamed in honor of Ulysses S. Grant in 1901. The park's formal, parterre landscape was designed by Edward H. Bennett at approximately the same time.

The *Plan of Chicago* visualized the park as a French-Renaissance landscape featuring civic institutions, a vision hampered by longstanding regulations protecting the park as open space. This situation was resolved when the southern part of the park expanded through numerous infill projects, most notably under landscape architect Alfred Caldwell utilizing Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds in the 1930s.

Significant as the site of numerous demonstrations in 1968 during the Democratic National Convention, the park is home to the Field Museum of Natural History, Art Institute of Chicago, and Shedd Aquarium, with Adler Planetarium nearby in Burnham Park. In 1995 the space between these civic structures, known as Museum Campus, was transformed from an expanse of pavement to broad sweeps of lawn with paths and trees. Twenty years later Maggie Daley Park, designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates landscape architects, was established to the immediate north of the park.

Additional features of Grant Park include the *General John Alexander Logan Monument* (1897), designed by architect Stanford White, and sculptors Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Alexander Phimister Proctor; and the *Clarence Buckingham Memorial Fountain* (1927). The Beaux-Arts water feature was given by Kate Buckingham in honor of her brother and was designed by architects Bennett, Parsons & Frost, working with engineer Jacques H. Lambert and sculptor Marcel Francois Loyau.

Grant Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It was individually listed in 1993.

Historical Name:

Lake Park
Lakefront Park

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Neighborhood Park
Institutional Grounds—Cultural Inst.

Landscape Style:

Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical

Designed by:

Edward H. Bennett
Bennet, Parsons & Frost
Daniel H. Burnham
Alfred Caldwell
Confluence
McKim, Mead & White
Alexander Phimister Proctor
Augustus Saint-Gaudens
Site Design Group

Related Landscape:

Plan of Chicago



Photo by Scott Shigley



Photo by Kristina D.C. Hoepfner



Art Institute of Chicago, South Garden

Measuring approximately one acre, this intimately scaled, sunken garden, built atop a parking garage on the south side of the Art Institute of Chicago, opens onto South Michigan Avenue. Designed and constructed between 1962 and 1967, the garden is one of Dan Kiley's best-preserved commissions from that period.

Blending classical and Modern principles, the design is elegant in composition and material. Parallel to the avenue, two elongated, raised planters flank the garden's main entrance and contain three staggered rows of honey locust trees edged with a low privet hedge and underplanted with ivy ground cover and spring flowering bulbs. Moving inward from the avenue, a central, rectangular pool animated by jets terminates at a sculptural bronze-and-stone fountain by Lorado Taft, the *Fountain of the Great Lakes* (1913). The pool is flanked by recessed gardens, set eighteen inches below street level. On either side is a grid of square, marble-edged, 30-inch-tall planters that provide seating. The northern edge of the garden is defined by an elevated, balustraded terrace, whereas the southern edge is framed by a stone wall. Each planter is sited twenty feet on center, and together, they form a gridded bosque of cockspur hawthorn trees, which are underplanted with ivy ground cover and herbaceous plants for color in the summer months. The low branching trees create a canopy of dappled light over the ground plane carpeted in crushed stone. At the rear of the plaza, the allegorical sculpture is framed by a continuous low bed of honey locust trees underplanted with flowering shrubs, seasonal bulbs, and herbaceous plants that complement the beds along Michigan Avenue.

In 2015 the Art Institute of Chicago, South Garden received the ASLA Landmark Award.

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Institutional Grounds—Cultural Inst. Plaza

Landscape Style:
Modernist

Designed by:
Joe Karr
Daniel Urban Kiley
Office of Dan Kiley
Lorado Taft
Ian Tyndall



Photo by Nancy Slade

Millennium Park

Historical Name:
Lakefront Millennium Park

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park
Roof Garden

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical
Postmodernist

Designed By:
Frank O. Gehry & Associates
Gustafson Guthrie Nichol
Anish Kapoor
Piet Oudolf
Jaume Plensa
Renzo Piano Building Workshop
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Terry Guen Design Associates

This 24.5-acre park is situated to the northwest of Grant Park. Between 1852 and 1997, the land that is now Millennium Park was cluttered with parking lots, railway lines, and a station operated by the Illinois Central Railroad. Mayor Richard M. Daley convinced the railroad to donate its air rights to the City, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) developed a master plan to construct a park on top of subterranean parking and railroad infrastructure.

Opened in 2004, the park includes several amenities laid out as an extension of Grant Park’s outdoor rooms defined by mature sycamore, honey locust, and maple trees. At the heart of the park, the Jay Pritzker Pavilion includes a 4,000-seat bandshell designed by Frank O. Gehry & Associates (now Gehry Partners). A serpentine pedestrian bridge, also designed by Gehry, connects Millennium Park to Maggie Daley Park to the east. To the south of the Pavilion, the Great Lawn provides flexible space for 7,000 people. Beyond that, the three-acre Lurie Garden, designed by landscape architects Gustafson Guthrie Nichol and plantsman Piet Oudolf, offers a diverse and evolving collection of thematic plantings inspired by Midwestern ecosystems. West of the Lurie Garden, the 620-foot-long Nichols Bridgeway, designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, spans Monroe Street to connect the park to the Art Institute of Chicago. Nearby, *Crown Fountain*, by artist Jaume Plensa, is an interactive public art exhibition that features a black granite reflecting pool and two 50-foot towers that display videos of 1,000 faces spewing water through pursed lips. To the west of the pavilion, the polished surface of artist Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* (“The Bean”) reflects the surrounding city. The eight-acre, Beaux-Arts Chase Promenade provides an outdoor exhibit space and connects two outdoor galleries. In the northwest corner of Millennium Park, Wrigley Square comprises a lawn, a fountain, and a replica of the peristyle that stood in Grant Park between 1917 and 1953.



Photo by Heather Clemons



Photo by Ken Lund



Lurie Garden

Located northwest of Grant Park, this three-acre garden is an integral part of Millennium Park, created when the city acquired land from the Illinois Central Railroad in 1997. Sited atop a subterranean parking garage, the garden lies between the Jay Pritzker Pavilion and the Modern Wing at the Art Institute of Chicago. The garden was designed by Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Piet Oudolf, local landscape architects Terry Guen Design Associates, set and costume designer Robert Israel, with lighting by Schuler & Shook (now Schuler Shook).

Flanked on the north and west by a fifteen-foot-tall hedge, the garden is composed of two distinct sections bisected by a wooden boardwalk that floats atop a canal-like water feature. To the west of the boardwalk, dynamic sweeps of perennials create a constantly evolving palette of colors and textures, representing the Midwestern prairie. To the east, inspired by immersive marsh ecologies, a raised section comprises masses of subtly toned groundcover, shrubs, and trees (including black locust, redbud, and cherry). Breaking from the structural massing found throughout the garden, the southern section is loosely planted with mixed meadow perennials. Several axial paths provide circulation throughout; limestone and granite are used for retaining walls, steps, and curbs.

In 2008 the project received the ASLA General Design Award of Excellence.

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park
Roof Garden

Landscape Style:
Modernist

Designed by:
Gustafson Guthrie Nichol
Robert Israel
Piet Oudolf
Schuler & Shook
Terry Guen Design Associates

Related Landscape:
Millennium Park



Photo by Cary Simmons



Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Photo courtesy Center for Neighborhood Technology

Cascade Park

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Designed by:

bKL Architecture
Claude Cormier + Associés
Confluence
Living Habitats

Located west of Lake Michigan and DuSable Lake Shore Drive, this trapezoidal-shaped, 0.8-acre park descends 50 feet from North Harbor Drive to its base, marked by a pedestrian walk. Designed in 2021 by Claude Cormier + Associés, bKL Architecture, Living Habitats, and Confluence, it is built atop a steel cantilevered deck. Surrounded by high-rise residential buildings and edged by two concrete retaining walls, the steeply graded park offers visitors both enclosure and borrowed eastern lakefront views.

The park is characterized by nine terraces that alternate from narrow wedge-shaped beds to rectilinear lawns. The beds are planted with shrubs, including cotoneaster and Siberian cypress, while the lawns are interspersed with such deciduous canopy trees as red maple. An east-west oriented path separates the terraces from a richly planted berm, the “valley slope,” which screens a portion of the northern retaining wall from view. The path forms the spine of the walkway, or “zigzag promenade,” which meanders throughout the park, connecting and framing the terraces. The upper terraces include abstract sculptural features that provide seating and invite play.

Cascade Park’s southern edge is elevated above a service street and path, enabling vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists to pass underneath and connect with the lakefront. Stairs and a universally accessible ramp connect the park with the path, which continues east to meet a trail at the water’s edge.



Photos by Tom Rossiter

Lake Point Tower, Skyline Park

Providing panoramic views of Lake Michigan and the city’s skyline, this revolutionary skyscraper was carried out by George D. Schipporeit and John Heinrich, students and colleagues of Alfred Caldwell and Mies van der Rohe from the Illinois Institute of Technology. The 70-story residential tower was designed and constructed between 1965 and 1968. It was the tallest residential building in the world until 1993.

Among the earliest roof gardens in the city that actively promotes them today, Caldwell’s Prairie Style landscape for Skyline Park takes the form of a private, second-story, roof garden atop the tower’s parking garage. The 2.5-acre park includes many of the signature elements found in other Midwestern commissions by Caldwell, such as his lily pool in the city’s Lincoln Park and Eagle Point Park in Dubuque, Iowa. These landscape features include a kidney-shaped lagoon, cascades, a clearing known as a “sunroom,” rocky outcrops, a stepping-stone path, and native plants appropriate to the Prairie Style. Other essential residential amenities such as a swimming pool, playground, and barbecue area were also integrated into Caldwell’s design. In 2010 Hitchcock Design Group landscape architects prepared a master plan for the rehabilitation of the garden. Today the original design intent is largely intact.

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Roof Garden

Landscape Style:

Prairie Style

Designed by:

Alfred Caldwell
John Heinrich
Hitchcock Design Group
George D. Schipporeit



The Wild Mile

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Waterfront Development

Designed by:

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Omni Workshop

Urban Rivers

Extending along the eastern shore of the North Branch Canal of the Chicago River, this linear park, which opened in 2022, included a 700-foot-long floating boardwalk that was proposed in the Wild Mile Framework Vision (2019) by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and Omni Workshop (now Greenprint Partners) in collaboration with the non-profit organization Urban Rivers and City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development. Inviting people to the river’s edge and stewarding wildlife habitat, the Wild Mile also offers dramatic skyline views. It is the first of several projects intended to transform a mile-long, seventeen-acre industrialized section of the canal into a “floating eco-park.”

Inspired by *chinampas*, the Mesoamerican practice of growing crops in shallow water, the park is built on the water. Flanked to the east by a sheet pile retaining wall, the Wild Mile is composed of a system of connected modular floating units, designed by Urban Rivers. Accessed from West Eastman Street, the floating park is navigated by sustainable pine boardwalks that rise and fall with fluctuating water levels. The continuous zig-zag walkway, edged by a low wooden lip, is framed by a green apron of more than 10,000 plants, including more than 70 native wetland species (e.g., sedges, swamp milkweed, and hibiscus) established on the modules. The boardwalk, accessible by ramp or kayak, includes generous, rectangular sections that serve as outdoor classrooms equipped with movable furniture.

The project received an ASLA Honor Award in Urban Design in 2024.



Photo courtesy Greenprint Partners



Lathrop Homes

Historical Name:
Snow Estate subdivision
Julia C. Lathrop Homes

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
FHA-Approved Neighborhood

Landscape Style:
Picturesque

Designed by:
Robert DeGoyler
Jens Jensen
Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

This 35-acre public housing development on the North Side was built by the Public Works Administration (1938) and subsequently leased to the Chicago Housing Authority. Among the first of the city’s affordable housing communities, it was segregated in its early years—in keeping with federal policy—but gradually became racially integrated. Occupying a former industrial site along the Chicago River’s north branch, the property was designed by Jens Jensen and contains two- to five-story brick rowhouses traversed by a system of paved, curvilinear walks. Jensen collaborated with a team of architects and engineers, led by architect Robert DeGoyler, who designed the buildings in the Prairie Style and Arts and Crafts Style.

Throughout, apartment buildings are oriented toward public streets in order to create a network of private, traffic-free green spaces for use by residents in the back. South of Diversey Parkway, which bisects the community into northern and southern parcels, the wedge-shaped portion is characterized by lawns planted irregularly with deciduous canopy trees. T- and U-shaped buildings parallel Hoyne Avenue to the east and are distinguished by interior courtyards planted with deciduous canopy trees for shade and privacy. To the north, residential buildings are arranged similarly, angled obliquely to Clybourn Avenue, the major thoroughfare that traces the southeasterly course of the river. Buildings are situated around a T-shaped green with irregularly planted trees, including oaks, honey locusts, and flowering crab apples.

The Chicago Housing Authority and Related Properties collaborated on a rehabilitation plan (2018) that transformed the site into a mixed-income community. Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates rehabilitated the grounds based on Jensen’s original plans. The firm also renewed the Jimmy Thomas Nature Trail (2019), a curvilinear riverfront pedestrian route that spans the community’s length to the west. The trail is lined with river-facing benches and includes a boat launch, affording waterfront access.

Lathrop Homes was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2012.



Photo courtesy Related Midwest



Photos courtesy Related Midwest



Photo courtesy Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

Lincoln Park

At 1,208 acres, this is the city's largest public park, extending north from the historic Gold Coast neighborhood and running for more than six miles along Lake Michigan. Established in 1860 as Lake Park, the site initially constituted a 60-acre parcel of former cemetery. It was renamed for Abraham Lincoln in 1865, the same year that landscape gardener Swain Nelson was engaged.

The first park plan was implemented under Nelson's oversight. In 1869 the park expanded to 250 acres, incorporating portions of the Chicago City Cemetery and adjoining city burial grounds. Subsequently, the Lincoln Park Commission relocated burials and expanded the site through landfill. O.C. Simonds was named the park's consulting landscape gardener in 1903, while the 1930s ushered in a period of improvements and enhancements undertaken by the WPA. Critically, WPA funds supported Alfred Caldwell's redesign of the lily pool and the construction of numerous bridges, comfort stations, and beach houses.

Today, dense plantings and expansive meadows provide respite from the park's urban context and frame views of Lake Michigan and the downtown skyline. Park amenities include an open-air theater, diverse historic structures, a bird sanctuary, several ponds, a conservatory (designed by Joseph Lyman Silsbee in 1894) and its associated formal gardens, and a zoo (1868). Active recreational facilities include beaches, harbors, a golf course and driving range, baseball fields, a skate park, and an archery range.

Lincoln Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It was individually listed in 1994.

Historical Name:

Lake Park

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Large Municipal Park

Landscape Style:

Picturesque

Designed by:

Olof Benson
Alfred Caldwell
Confluence
Annette McCre
Swain Nelson
Joseph Lyman Silsbee
O.C. Simonds

Related Landscape:

Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool



Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool

Historical Name:
Rookery
Lily Pool

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Alfred Caldwell
Eifler & Associates Architects
Wolff Landscape Architecture

Related Landscape:
Lincoln Park

Designed by Alfred Caldwell in the 1930s while serving as an employee of the Chicago Park District, the 2.5-acre lily pool replaced a Victorian-era pool and garden (1889) that had displayed lilies and other tropical plants. Constructed with WPA funds, the landscape exemplifies Caldwell’s Prairie Style. It was Caldwell’s intent for the site to become “a hidden garden for the people of Megalopolis [Chicago].”

Nestled into Lincoln Park, the site is accessed through a low horizontal gateway made from wood and stratified stone. The lagoon evokes a glacial river cutting through limestone, with outcroppings symbolized by the striated stonework and with an open-air, wood-and-limestone pavilion that appears to float over the water’s edge. A native-stone waterfall at the north end of the pond suggests the glacial river’s source. Caldwell’s trademark native plantings include irises, tall grasses, deciduous trees, and shrubs. Natural limestone paths navigate gently rolling terrain through stands of trees, including oak, hackberry, and hawthorn. A “council ring”—a circular stone bench, popularized by Caldwell’s mentor Jens Jensen, for people to gather as equals to share ideas and experiences—sits in a clearing on a low wooded hill above the lagoon and serves as a space for communal interaction.

The Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It was restored and rehabilitated by Tedd Wolff of Wolff Landscape Architecture (now Confluence) with Eifler & Associates Architects in 2001. In 2006, it was designated a National Historic Landmark.



Photo by T Eric Allix Rogers

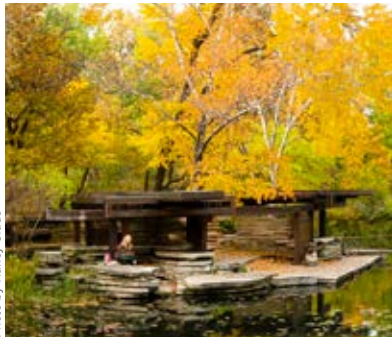


Photo by Nancy Stude



Photo by T Eric Allix Rogers



Graceland Cemetery

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Cemetery—Rural Cemetery

Landscape Style:
Picturesque
Prairie Style

Designed by:
H.W.S. Cleveland
Eifler & Associates
Hoerr Schaudt
Holabird & Roche
William Le Baron Jenney
Swain Nelson
William Saunders
O.C. Simonds
Wolff, Clements & Associates

In 1860 Thomas Barbour Bryan purchased 86 acres, one mile west of Lake Michigan and two miles north of the city limits for a new cemetery, engaging Swain Nelson and landscape gardener William Saunders to design 50 acres in the plot's southwest section. H.W.S. Cleveland further developed the cemetery's park-like setting in 1870 with a design that featured curvilinear paths along gently graded topography and expansive, grassy plots uninterrupted by railings, which created a seamless sequence of green spaces.

In the late 1870s an additional 35 acres were acquired, and William Le Baron Jenney was engaged to drain the marshy eastern portion, lay out new drives and earthworks, and create Lake Willowmere, a Picturesque drainage reservoir with an island where the ashes of architect Daniel H. Burnham are buried. In 1881 O.C. Simonds replaced Jenney and introduced plantings that focused views internally, creating a sense of immersion in a varied landscape. A perimeter wall and dense vegetation heightened this effect and screened the city beyond. The cemetery's monuments, whose designs typify prevailing art and architectural styles of their time, were subordinated into the landscape and blended with naturalistic plantings to create a series of secluded outdoor rooms connected by grass paths. Architects Holabird & Roche (now Holabird & Root) designed several contributing structures, such as the cast iron gates for the main entrance at the intersection of Clark Street and Irving Park Road and the Administration Building (both 1896).

The island in Lake Willowmere was rehabilitated in 2007 by landscape architect Ted Wolff of Wolff Landscape Architecture (now Confluence). In 2023 Hoerr Schaudt landscape architects transformed the main entrance into a plaza that serves as a threshold and flexible gathering space; this included a new iron archway whose planting design draws upon the original design intent.

Graceland Cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 and added to the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom in 2021.



Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Photo by Scott Shigley



Photo by Linda Oyama Bryan



Photo by Shutter Runner

Logan Square Boulevards Historic District

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical

Designed by:
Henry Bacon
William Le Baron Jenney

Related Landscapes:
Humboldt Boulevard
Kedzie Boulevard
Logan Boulevard
Logan Square
Palmer Square

As part of the 29-mile Chicago Boulevard Park System conceived in the later part of the nineteenth century, this historic district measures 265 acres. At Logan Square, the northern terminus of the system, Logan Boulevard extends east toward North Western Avenue and Lake Michigan, and south to Kedzie Boulevard. The square, boulevard, and neighborhood were named for Civil War General and Illinois Congressman John A. Logan. The oval-shaped square, diagonally bisected by Milwaukee Avenue, is home to the Illinois Centennial Monument. The soaring, round stone column sits on a square concrete terrace, raised above grade on an earthen berm on the western half of the site. The monument was designed by architect Henry Bacon (who later designed the Lincoln Memorial) and dedicated in 1918 to celebrate the centennial of the state.

Largely intact both architecturally and in plan, these roads have central two-way traffic lanes with wide medians and narrower one-way streets fronting residential properties. The medians are planted with deciduous canopy trees, lawn, and seasonal herbaceous plantings at the intersections. The neighborhood’s single-family homes and civic buildings are an eclectic mix of styles distinctive within the city.

The Logan Square Boulevards Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and is a contributing feature of the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018.



Photos by Danielle Fisher



Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



The 606

Extending 2.7 miles along Bloomindale Avenue, this elevated, linear park incorporates an embankment to transform a former rail line into a pedestrian path. In 2001, when the tracks were decommissioned, the Chicago Park District and the Trust for Public Land engaged Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA) to design a park that supports diverse recreational opportunities. Completed in 2015 it is named for the first three digits of the local zip code and connects the neighborhoods of Wicker Park, Bucktown, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square.

The elevated structure encompasses a continuous, fourteen-foot-wide, paved promenade from end to end that was lushly planted with more than 200 species including burr oak, grasses, and sedges, supplemented with poplar, sumac, and paperbark maple trees that evoke diverse habitats.

For most of its extent, the path is 30 feet wide; at its western edge it widens to 60 feet. MVVA strategically cut into the embankment to introduce topographical variation. The path is also framed by arced streetlamps and ample benches that allow visitors to enjoy the elevated vantage point. Conceptual artist Frances Whitehead strategically planted serviceberry specimens throughout to reveal seasonal climatic changes associated with the lake effect.

Entrances are located irregularly along the route, including connections to four adjoining parks. The western section is anchored by a mound, named the Exelon Observatory, which is navigated by a spiral path and topped by a circular enclosure edged by a stainless-steel lip. Designed by Whitehead to evoke the Chankillo Archaeoastronomical Complex in Peru, the lip includes four notches that frame the setting sun of each equinox and solstice. The mound, intended for stargazing, affords views of the surrounding landscape. The project received an ASLA Honor Award in Urban Design in 2020.

Historical Names:
Bloomingdale Line
Bloomingdale Trail

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park

Designed by:
Jacobs/Ryan Associates
Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates
Frances Whitehead



Photos by Eric Allix Rogers



Humboldt Park



The West Park System of Chicago was created in 1869. Douglass (formerly Douglas) Park, Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, and their connecting boulevards were laid out by William Le Baron Jenney in 1871. At the 206-acre Humboldt Park, construction was slow and only the northeastern section was built according to Jenney's design. With much of the park unrealized and deteriorating by the early 1900s, Jens Jensen had the opportunity to experiment with his evolving Prairie Style. His design included an extension of the existing lagoon, designed and built to emulate a natural "prairie river." The expanded waterway included rocky brooks that fed into it, overlooks for fishing, pedestrian bridges, and aquatic plants such as arrowroot, cattails, and water lilies. Jensen also designed a naturalistic perennial garden and circular rose garden (now the Formal Garden), the latter of which was rehabilitated in 2018 by Hitchcock Design Group and Piet Oudolf. Additional park structures and furnishings include a boat house (1907) by architects Schmidt, Garden & Martin, a pair of bronze bison sculptures by Edward Kemeys, and Prairie-Style lanterns and urns designed by Jens Jensen.

Humboldt Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018. In 1992 it was listed individually.

Historical Name:
North Park

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Style:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Designed by:
Oscar F. Dubuis
Hitchcock Design Group
William Le Baron Jenney
Jens Jensen
Edward Kemeys
Piet Oudolf
Schmidt, Garden & Martin

Related Landscape:
West Park System



Garfield Park Conservatory

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Botanical Garden

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Hitchings & Company
Douglas Hoerr
Jens Jensen
August Koch

Related Landscape:
Garfield Park

Located in Garfield Park and measuring two acres, this conservatory was designed by Jens Jensen in collaboration with the New York-based engineering firm Hitchings & Company. The large structure replaced three smaller greenhouses dating to the 1880s. Considered revolutionary when it opened in 1908, its form emulated a Midwestern haystack, while its interior rooms provided magnificent views. Jensen accomplished this by keeping the centers of rooms open and planting into the ground plane rather than exhibiting plants in potted containers. Walls of stratified stone separated interior spaces and hid mechanical systems. The Fern Room, as the complex’s central focus, includes a “prairie waterfall” and pool bordered by stratified stone. Jensen’s original plant collections were improved upon by August Koch, chief florist at the conservatory from 1912 through the 1930s. Koch turned the original Conifer House into an Aroid House but remained faithful to Jensen’s design idiom.

Rehabilitation efforts began in 1995 following decades of deferred maintenance. Three years later the non-profit Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance was established, which collaborates with the Chicago Park District on programing and interpretation. Adjacent to the conservatory is a Jensen-inspired City Garden, accessed by a bluestone terrace and also a winding path at the southwest corner that leads past mounds and beehives along the Lake Street border. Designed in 2008 by Douglas Hoerr, this garden focuses on an offset elliptical lily pond—bisected by a wooden bridge—and a prairie-like meadow, around which are planted clusters of hawthorns, quaking aspens, and sugar maples. The conservatory was significantly damaged during a 2011 hailstorm and has since been restored.

Garfield Park and its conservatory are contributing features of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018. They were both listed individually in 1993.



Photo by Jay Keeman



Douglass Park

Designed by William Le Baron Jenney in 1871, two years after the creation of the West Park System, this 174-acre park—a Picturesque assemblage of lagoon, lawn, and trees—was originally named for Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas. After opening in 1879 the park was sectioned by a diagonal, linear thoroughfare: Ogden Avenue. Six years later Oscar Dubuis prepared a new plan and by the turn of the century, park embellishments included a conservatory, ornamental gardens, and the city’s first public bathing facility, replete with a swimming pool, outdoor gym, and a no-longer existing natatorium.

Upon becoming superintendent and landscape architect for all of Chicago’s West Parks in 1905, Jens Jensen made design revisions to the southern section of the park, introducing a semi-circular, ornamental entrance and soon after, a rectangular, seven-acre formal garden (1907). At the garden’s western end, Jensen established a modest, oval water feature and at the eastern end, sited “Flower Hall,” a Prairie-Style shelter attributed to architects Schmidt, Garden & Martin.

In the northern section of the park, the lagoon is fronted by a Georgian Revival Style field house, designed by architects Michaelsen & Rognstad (1928), and a public high school (1973) that occupies a former meadow originally designed by Jensen.

Following advocacy efforts of local students the park was renamed in 2020 in honor of abolitionists Anna and Frederick Douglass. Douglass Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018.

Historical Names:
Douglas Park
South Park

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Oscar F. Dubuis
William Le Baron Jenney
Jens Jensen
Michaelsen & Rognstad

Related Landscape:
West Park System



Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Photos by Courtney Spearman



Columbus Park

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Chatten and Hammond
Jens Jensen
Wolff Landscape Architecture

Related Landscape:
West Park System

Unlike the city’s west parklands, Columbus Park was created entirely by Jens Jensen, who designed it between 1915 and 1920. Representing the culmination of his ideas, this 135-acre Prairie Style landscape seven miles west of downtown is considered his public masterpiece.

Columbus Park’s design includes a meandering lagoon intended to emulate a “prairie river,” complete with cascades and gentle waterfalls constructed of stratified stone. Jensen integrated a pre-existing nine-hole golf course into his plan and used native plants throughout, including hawthorn, oak, and linden trees. He designed a meadow, named the Players’ Green to host outdoor performances. The meadow is flanked by a pair of clearings, framed by native vegetation, intended to serve as backstage dressing rooms. Columbus Park is the only park in Chicago designed by Jensen with his signature council ring. Located on the lagoon’s northwestern shore, a Mediterranean-revival style refectory, designed by Chatten and Hammond, was added in 1922.

In 1953, nine acres of parkland were surrendered to the Eisenhower Expressway and by the early 1990s the site suffered from neglect and deferred maintenance. In 1993 the Chicago Park District rehabilitated sections of the park; ten years later it engaged Wolff Landscape Architecture (now Confluence) to restore the council ring.

Columbus Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It was individually listed in 1991 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2003.



Photos by Eric Allix Rogers



Old Chicago Post Office

Historical Names:

United States Mail Building
United States Post Office
Main Chicago Post Office

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Roof Garden

Designed by:

Edward H. Bennett
Daniel H. Burnham
Graham, Anderson, Probst & White
Hoerr Schaudt

Related Landscape:

Plan of Chicago

First constructed in 1921 and then expanded in 1934, this limestone-clad, nine- and twelve-story Art Deco building was proposed in Burnham and Bennett's *Plan of Chicago* and designed by architects Graham, Anderson, Probst & White. The approximately 2.5 million-square-foot structure edges the west bank of the Chicago River's South Branch and spans Interstate 290 (Eisenhower Expressway) where it turns into Ida B. Wells Drive, signaling to highway travelers that they have reached the Loop. Built atop a below-grade railway and at-grade roads, the expansion required the demolition of much of the original structure, though the original east facade remains intact.

In 1997 the building was vacated, and in 2009 sold into private hands—ultimately becoming a mixed-use development for office and retail. In 2023 Hoerr Schaudt completed a three-acre rooftop garden nestled within a panoramic cityscape of varied skyscrapers. The garden is unified by a ground plane carpeted in a prairie-inspired meadow that offers a rich tapestry of understory flowering perennials and small shrubs. Additional amenities include pavilions, movable seating, a running track, and basketball and tennis courts. Among the largest private rooftop gardens in the country, it deploys innovative soil mixes and stormwater filtration to support more than 50 plant species, 41,000 individual plants, and three bee colonies. Paved pathways zig-zag through plantings to create visually appealing geometries and facilitate circulation.

In 2023 the rooftop garden received an ASLA Honor Award in General Design. The Old Chicago Main Post Office Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.



Photo by Dave Burk, courtesy Hoerr Schaudt



Photo by Terry Ryan



Chicago Women's Park & Gardens

Located between the tree-lined, north-south thoroughfares of South Prairie and South Indiana Avenues, this 3.2-acre plot, which opened in 2000, honors noteworthy Chicago women and provides the setting for one of the oldest extant buildings in the city: the Greek Revival Clarke-Ford House (begun 1836, relocated from two blocks south in 1977). The property, edged to the north by the Romanesque Revival Glessner House (1887), includes a central fountain from which three linear, gravel walks radiate north, south, and east, creating irregularly shaped lawn panels. Characterized by a circular pool and raised basin surrounded by boxwood hedges and stone benches, the fountain is oriented on axis with the Clarke-Ford House and the gated east and west entrances. A looping, curvilinear concrete path edges the site, encompassing the Clarke-Ford House grounds, and is bordered by a dense canopy of deciduous trees.

In 2000 a master plan for the property's rehabilitation was developed by McKay Landscape Architects and architect Tannys Langdon. The plan flanks the historic house with formal parterre gardens, including an ornamental orchard of deciduous trees with a groundcover of flowering perennials. Circular motifs recur throughout: in the fountain and, in the formal gardens, with a platform that includes *Helping Hands*, Louise Bourgeois's bronze sculpture of 1996 (relocated from Navy Pier in 2011), which honors Chicago social activist Jane Addams. The property also includes a community garden of perennials, culinary and medicinal herbs, and other indigenous plants that have historically thrived in the region.

The Clarke-Ford and Glessner Houses were designated National Historic Landmarks in 1971 and 1976, respectively. The Chicago Women's Park and Gardens is located within the Prairie Avenue Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

Historical Name:

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Women's Park of Chicago

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Neighborhood Park
Commemorative Landscape

Designed by:

Louise Bourgeois
McKay Landscape Architects
Tannys Langdon



Photo by Les Boschke



Photo by Devyn Caldwell



Photo by Les Boschke

Ping Tom Memorial Park

Photos by Scott Shigley, courtesy Site Design Group



This approximately nineteen-acre park with dramatic skyline views stretches for nearly a half mile along the eastern bank of the Chicago River's south branch and commemorates civic leader Ping Tom (1935–1995), who was an early advocate for its creation. Originally a railroad yard, it was conceived to provide public green space following the construction in 1962 of the South Route Expressway (now Dan Ryan Expressway). This highway construction had sacrificed Chinatown's only public parks, Stanford Park (constructed by the West Park Commission in the early-twentieth century) and Hardin Square Park (designed by Olmsted Brothers in 1913). In 1991 the Chicago Park District acquired approximately twelve acres between Sixteenth and Twentieth Streets, and, in 1998, engaged Ernest Wong of Site Design Group to develop the park's general plan. In 2002, the city acquired additional acreage at the northwest corner of Wentworth and Eighteenth Streets.

The first phase of development, completed in 1999, transformed approximately seven acres south of the Eighteenth Street Bridge. Evoking a traditional Chinese courtyard and gateway, four columns at the park's West Nineteenth Street entrance frame views of a divided, shade-tree bosque and a pagoda-style pavilion. Symmetrical sets of stairs descend to a water taxi terminal at the river's edge, from which visitors can travel to and from the Loop. A second phase introduced a straightened river edge and naturalized shoreline; a floating, 300-linear foot boardwalk; and a community plaza. A boathouse and fieldhouse followed, introducing additional recreation facilities.

A series of courtyards connected by curvilinear walkways create distinct landscape experiences. These paths cut across lawns interspersed with groupings of boulders and shade trees, such as ash, ginkgo, maple, oak, and willow. In 2018 the east plaza of the Eighteenth Street Bridge underpass, bisecting the park north of center, was decorated with murals reminiscent of Ming dynasty porcelain.

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park
Waterfront Park

Landscape Style:
Chinese

Designed by:
Site Design Group



Illinois Institute of Technology

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Campus—Multiversity Campus

Landscape Style:
Modernist

Designed by:
Alfred Caldwell
Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape
Architecture

Conceived by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as a “campus in a park,” the 120-acre grounds were designed by Alfred Caldwell in the 1940s. The Modernist campus design invokes a solid-void pattern with the solids (buildings) symmetrically ordered around a central axis (33rd Street) and the voids (green spaces between buildings) flowing into one another. This theme of flow is continued in the transparent nature of the glass-and-steel buildings, which creates a continuous vista throughout the campus. Trees, such as honey locusts, with delicate leaves were planted and limbed up, and shrubs were established sparingly to enhance the transparency of the ground plane at eye level.

In the 1990s, the evolved campus underwent rehabilitation efforts and in 1999 a landscape master plan was completed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates and Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape Architecture (now Hoerr Schaudt). The plan transformed State Street from a boundary into a unifying element: on-street parking was removed, the boulevard was enlarged, and leafy catalpas, elms, and ash trees with extensive canopies were planted. Crown Hall Field was graded with sloping lawns for seating and an open center for recreation and play. In 2002 the Pritzker-Galvin Grove and fountain were added to the northeastern corner of the field.

In 2005 Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape Architecture received an ASLA Honor Award in Design. Crown Hall (1956) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and as a National Historic Landmark in 2001, while the campus was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005. In 2023 the university established the Alphawood Arboretum to steward its trees and woody plants as natural and cultural resources.



Photo by Ron Henderson



Sherman Park

Photos by Eric Allix Rogers



At 61 acres, Sherman Park is one of the largest of ten South-Side neighborhood parks designed by Olmsted Brothers in 1904 (the others include Ogden, Palmer, Bessemer, and Hamilton Parks, and Russell, Davis, Armour, Cornell and Mark White Squares). John Charles Olmsted drafted the model for this series of parks, which focused on active recreation and were part of a reform-minded, nation-wide campaign to provide crowded neighborhoods with “breathing spaces” and venues for socialization.

The most significant feature in Sherman Park’s design—distinctive in Olmsted Brothers’s park commissions—is a closed-loop lagoon that roughly parallels the site’s rectangular boundaries and covers two-thirds of the park. The island meadow created by the Picturesque lagoon accommodates playing fields, with thinly planted stands of canopy trees around its perimeter. In all four corners of the park, neoclassical stone pedestrian bridges provide access to the island and connect to an oval, vehicular drive that circulates around the park. A gentle berm buffers the park from the surrounding streets.

Athletic facilities and a fieldhouse designed by D.H. Burnham & Company are positioned in a more formally designed landscape on the northern section of the park. The classical buildings are linked with a pergola that unifies the complex. The park was named in honor of John B. Sherman, founder of the Union Stock Yards and member of the South Park Commission for 25 years.

Sherman Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018. It was listed individually in 1990.

Historical Name:
South Park No. 7

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical
Picturesque

Designed by:
Daniel H. Burnham
D.H. Burnham & Company
Olmsted Brothers
John Charles Olmsted



Washington Park

Historical Name:
Western Division of South Park
Park No. 21

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Picturesque

Designed by:
Daniel H. Burnham
H.W.S. Cleveland
Olmsted Brothers
Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
John Charles Olmsted
Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot
Olmsted, Vaux & Co.
Site Design Group
Lorado Taft
Calvert Vaux

Related Landscape:
South Park System

This 367-acre, rectangular park was designed by Olmsted, Vaux & Co. in 1870 as part of the 1,055-acre South Park System and is linked to Jackson Park via the Midway Plaisance. Located one mile inland from Lake Michigan, the flat, prairie terrain was transformed into a two-part park. The north end of the site—the South Open Green, which is a large, pastoral meadow originally grazed by sheep—provides a mile-long, uninterrupted view of open parkland. Groves of shade trees enclose the meadow and add vertical interest to the prairie’s horizontality. In the south, an expansive meer was excavated and punctuated with simple footbridges that span the Picturesque pond at its most narrow points. The excavated soil was recycled as a perimeter berm, running along the park’s eastern boundary, echoing a similar glacial ridge on the western side. Construction began in 1872 and was overseen by H.W.S. Cleveland, and in 1881 the park was renamed in honor of President George Washington. In the 1880s, Burnham designed the limestone refectory and round stables and, in 1910, added the South Park Commission administrative headquarters (now the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center).

During the Great Migration, when southern African Americans relocated to northern cities, the neighborhood surrounding the park was incorporated into the city’s “Black Belt.” Though never formally segregated, by the late 1920s African Americans constituted the majority of the park’s visitors.

Lorado Taft’s *Fountain of Time* (1922), an expansive concrete composition oriented around a reflecting pool, is the hinge that links this park to the Midway Plaisance.

Washington Park is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018. It was listed individually in 2004.



Photo by Lucas Blair



Photos by Eric Alix Rogers



Midway Plaisance

Measuring 85 acres, this linear park, which cuts through the University of Chicago campus, includes a mile-long boulevard that links Washington and Jackson Parks. Designed in 1870 by Olmsted and Vaux as part of their South Park System, the park was meant to feature a pleasure drive and an intricate canal system that would provide a waterway from Lake Michigan to the Washington Park meer, but this design was never realized.

In 1893 the Midway was selected as the area to host the entertainment section of the World’s Columbian Exposition. Amusements such as the world’s first Ferris wheel were located here, as were exhibitions, foreign pavilions, and other attractions. After the exhibition closed, the site was redesigned by Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot to include drives lined with elm trees, walks, bridle paths, and an axial canal down the center (never realized). A dry fosse currently marks the proposed location of the canal.

The Midway has been improved over the last century. In 1922, Taft’s 126-foot-long allegorical *Fountain of Time* (with consultation about the concrete by John Joseph Earley), was added at the park’s western end. A sunken perennial Women’s Garden designed by Chicago Park District landscape architect May E. McAdams was installed at the Midway’s eastern end in the 1930s.

Olin Partnership (now OLIN) and Wolff Clements and Associates landscape architects (now Confluence) developed a master plan for the Midway in 2000, resulting in designs for the Dr. Allison Davis Garden, Winter Garden, Reader’s Garden, and an ice rink. The former, conceptually linked to Taft’s fountain, was rehabilitated by Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape Architecture (now Hoerr Schaudt) in 2005. In 2021, the Women’s Garden was demolished to make way for the Obama Presidential Center.

The Midway Plaisance is a contributing feature of the Jackson Park Historic Landscape District and Midway Plaisance listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. It is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018.



Photo by Douglas Amell Williams



Photo courtesy Site Design Group



Photo by Eric Alix Rogers

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park
Boulevard

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical

Designed by:
Henry Sargent Codman
John Joseph Earley
May E. McAdams
Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot
Olmsted, Vaux & Co.
Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape
Architecture
Calvert Vaux
Wolff Clements and Associates

Related Landscape:
South Park System

University of Chicago

Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Founded in 1890 through the beneficence of John D. Rockefeller, the historic center of this now 217-acre campus was built on a three-block parcel donated by Marshall Field. Architect Henry Ives Cobb conceived the quadrangular arrangement, in which 30 Collegiate Gothic buildings enclose six courtyards. In 1901 O.C. Simonds created a Picturesque setting around the quadrangles with informal clusters of plantings and meandering paths. The following year Olmsted Brothers created an axial master plan with lawns and linear paths framed by stately American elm trees producing an understated formality; campus-wide coherence was maintained through the stylistic uniformity of the architecture and spatial symmetry.

Landscape gardener Beatrix Farrand updated the campus master plan in 1929, introducing native shrubs and trees, such as crab apples, to the campus and designing new benches. Architect Eero Saarinen, working with landscape architect Dan Kiley, undertook another master plan (1955) that resulted in the Modernist Laird Bell Law Quadrangle with its central courtyard that included a reflecting pool and fountain, and intimate terraces adorned with sculptures by Antoine Pevsner and Kenneth Armitage. A master plan (1999, revised 2004) was undertaken by architects NBBJ resulting in the campus's expansion beyond its historic core.

The institution has a long history of working with landscape architects, including Culliton Quinn, Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape Architecture (now Hoerr Schaudt), and Kettelkamp & Kettelkamp. Several campus structures are designated as National Historic Landmarks, including Chicago Pile-1 (the world's first nuclear reactor) and the Robie House, designed in 1909 by Frank Lloyd Wright and purchased by the university in 1963.

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Campus—Quadrangle Plan

Landscape Style:
Beaux-Arts / Neoclassical
Picturesque

Designed by:
Henry Ives Cobb
Culliton Quinn
Beatrix Farrand
Jacobs/Ryan Associates
Kettelkamp & Kettelkamp
Daniel Urban Kiley
NBBJ
Office of Dan Kiley
Olmsted Brothers
John Charles Olmsted
Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape
Architecture
Eero Saarinen
Shepley, Ruttan & Coolidge
O.C. Simonds
Frank Lloyd Wright

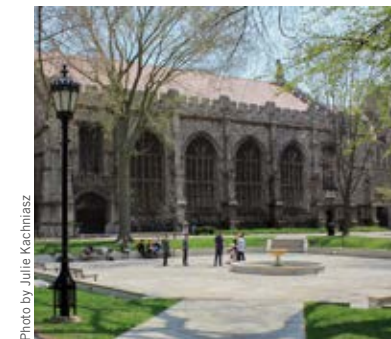


Photo by Julie Kachniasz

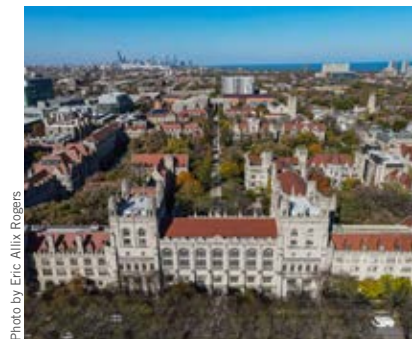


Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Photo by Warren LeMay

Promontory Point

Historical Name:
55th Street Promontory

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:
Public Park—Neighborhood Park

Landscape Style:
Prairie Style

Designed by:
Emanuel V. Buchsbaum
Alfred Caldwell
Elizabeth Hibbard
Frederick Hibbard

Related Landscape:
Burnham Park

Located at the southern end of Burnham Park, this 40-acre, artificial peninsula projects into Lake Michigan. Created with WPA funding and labor following the Chicago World’s Fair of 1933, it was created from landfill and lined with a stepped revetment of large limestone blocks. Designed in 1937 by Alfred Caldwell in the Prairie Style, the naturalistic design features a raised, central meadow with interspersed groves of mature trees, native plantings, and a significant amount of stone. Signature council rings, previously employed by Caldwell and Jensen in other Chicago parks, punctuate the lakefront and serve as gathering areas for small groups. A masonry Field House (1937), designed by architect Emanuel V. Buchsbaum, sits at the top of the meadow. Park access is served via the Lakefront Trail, which passes under Lake Shore Drive through a tunnel. Water-oriented access is also available, and the shallow water around the point makes the site favored for swimming. Designed by Elizabeth and Frederick Hibbard and topped by a bronze fawn, the *David Wallach Memorial Fountain* (1939), is visible to visitors immediately upon emerging from the pedestrian tunnel. In 1953 a 150-foot radar tower for the Nike Hercules missile defense system was erected on the point but dismantled in 1971.

The non-profit, Promontory Park Conservancy, works with the city to protect and preserve the park. Promontory Point is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It was individually listed in 2018.



Photo by Steven Severinghaus



Photo by Courtney Spearman



Photo by Eric Allix Rogers

Photo by Eric Allix Rogers



Bronzeville-Black Metropolis National Heritage Area

Historical Name:
Black Metropolis

Landscape Category:
Historic Site
Vernacular Landscape

Related Landscape:
Washington Park
Woodlawn

Bounded by 18th Street to the north, 71st Street to the south, and Canal Street to the west (excluding Hyde Park), this irregularly shaped, 5,500-acre precinct is defined by its proximity to the Lake Michigan shore and incorporates approximately 3.5 miles of waterfront. During the Great Migration of the early-twentieth century, many southern African Americans settled on the South Side between Cottage Grove Avenue and State Street, altering the neighborhood's demography. As migration continued, the community expanded southward and, by 1940, encompassed Washington Park. It earned the name Bronzeville in 1930 when James Gentry, a theater editor for the African American-owned *Chicago Bee*, proposed the term. By the mid-twentieth century the neighborhood had become a center for African American art, culture, and business—often described as Chicago's Harlem Renaissance.

The *Plan of Chicago* proposed improvements to the gridded South Side—such as new radial avenues and broadened boulevards—which incorporated the South Park System of the 1870s. The precinct is characterized by linear streets; many are lined with trees and sidewalks and feature a combination of historic Greystones (ca. 1890–1930), with their distinctive limestone facades, and more recent development. Within the district, 76 sites are designated as National Historic Landmarks (e.g., the Robert S. Abbot House and Oscar Stanton DePriest House) or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (e.g., the McClurg Building and Reid House). Washington Park is situated between the area's two major arteries: the north-south Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and Cottage Grove Avenue, which constitute the western and eastern edges, respectively. The area is also home to several institutions of higher education, including Chicago State University.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive is a contributing feature of the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2018. In 2023 Bronzeville-Black Metropolis was designated a National Heritage Area.



Photo by Douglas Amel Williams



Photos by Eric Allix Rogers



Woodlawn

Situated directly south of Washington Park and the Midway Plaisance, this irregularly shaped neighborhood measures approximately two square miles. Bound broadly by East 60th Street, South DuSable Lake Shore Drive, East 67th Street, and South Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive, Woodlawn borders Jackson Park to the east and Parkway Garden Homes to the west.

Initially developed in the 1850s by Dutch farmers, Woodlawn expanded in the early 1890s prior to the World's Columbian Exposition. Beginning in 1928, racial covenants barred people of color from acquiring or renting property in the community. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling of 1940 made such covenants illegal and Woodlawn subsequently became a predominantly African American, middle-class neighborhood. In 1955 the neighborhood garnered national attention after fourteen-year-old resident Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi.

The relatively level neighborhood comprises gridded, tree-lined streets, oriented north-south and east-west. Many of the buildings, primarily bungalows and two- and three-story residences, were established in the late nineteenth century with minimal setbacks. Elevated train tracks bisect Woodlawn from east to west along East 63rd Street, as well as from north to south on the eastern end. The neighborhood features several parks and community gardens, including Mamie Till-Mobley Park, Wadsworth Campus Park, and the Mamie Till-Mobley Forgiveness Garden. The latter was established in 2019 by the environmental justice non-profit Blacks in Green to commemorate the activist and mother of Emmett Till, Mamie Till-Mobley. The following year the organization acquired the Till-Mobley residence, located less than one block south of the garden.

The western section of Woodlawn is located within the Bronzeville-Black Metropolis National Heritage Area, designated in 2023.



Photos courtesy Blacks In Green



Landscape Category:
Historic Site
Vernacular Landscape

Related Landscape:
Bronzeville-Black Metropolis
National Heritage Area

Jackson Park

Designed by Olmsted, Vaux & Co. in 1871 as part of the 1,055-acre South Park System, this 593-acre park is connected to Washington Park via a mile-long boulevard, the Midway Plaisance. Conceived as an escape from urban strains, the swampy land adjacent to Lake Michigan was transformed into a Picturesque setting in which water figured as the primary element. Olmsted and Vaux envisioned an interconnected system of waterways, lushly planted and accessible from the lake. In the original design, entrance via steamboat from Lake Michigan was envisioned as the primary approach. Originally called Lake Park, it was later named for former president Andrew Jackson.

In 1893, Jackson Park became the site for the World's Columbian Exposition. A "White City" of neoclassical structures, planned by Daniel H. Burnham and Olmsted with associate Henry Codman, was built as a system of lagoons with a formal Court of Honor. After the Exposition, the site reverted to parkland designed by Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot. Additions to this plan include the first public golf course west of the Allegheny Mountains in 1899; the expansion of lakefront beaches in the 1900s; and, in 1935, on the park's Wooded Island, a Japanese garden (now Osaka Garden).

In 2016 Heritage Landscapes prepared a framework plan that led to the restoration of the lagoon's ecology and renewal of Olmsted's design intent which introduced a Great Lawn and Music Court. Five years later, approximately nineteen acres of parkland were appropriated for the Obama Presidential Center, designed by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects and Michael van Valkenburgh Associates, working with Site Design Group and Living Habitats.

Jackson Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. It is a contributing feature of the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District listed in 1990 and the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District listed in 2018.

Historical Name:

Lake Park
South Park

Landscape Category:

Designed Landscape

Landscape Type:

Public Park—Large Municipal Park

Landscape Style:

Picturesque

Designed by:

Daniel H. Burnham
Henry Sargent Codman
Masamichi Kuru
Living Habitats
Heritage Landscapes
May E. McAdams
Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
John Charles Olmsted
Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot
Olmsted, Vaux & Co.
Sadafumi Uchiyama
Calvert Vaux

Related Landscape:

South Park System

Photos by Eric Allix Rogers



Kenwood Gardens

Landscape Category:
Designed Landscape

Designed by:
Site Design Group
Theaster Gates Studio

Nestled between South Kenwood Avenue and a parallel alley in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood, over the course of six years, this 1.3-acre, relatively flat site was assembled from thirteen formerly vacant, contiguous lots acquired by Theaster Gates and his Rebuild Foundation. The project, which opened in 2021, is part of Gates’s quest for social change through art, agriculture, and community engagement.

Designed by Site Design Group landscape architects, Kenwood Gardens is composed of a series of irregularly shaped “rooms,” set in rectangular arrangement roughly north to south, and marked by walls constructed of salvaged brick. At the garden’s rough center, a flexible communal space for programs and performances is anchored at its western edge by a relatively square metal pavilion with a corrugated roof.

Moving south from the performance area, diagonal wooden boardwalks and paved paths navigate trapezoidal beds richly planted with shrubs, tall grasses, perennials, and flowering trees, such as dogwood, often found in native prairies. East of the stage, facing allées contain American hornbeam trees, while north of the stage, a rectangular lawn panel is distinguished by a single, mature Siberian elm tree, and an east-west axial connection to a brick archway. From here, the garden’s northeastern room unfolds to a view of an arcing, mown path.

Kenwood Gardens is one of several neighborhood projects conceived and spearheaded by Gates, who, in a 2020 interview, stated that “planting a garden is similar to making a work of art. After you plant the seed, it has the ability to keep giving, and I think art works like that.”



Photo courtesy Rebuild Foundation / Kenwood Gardens



Photo courtesy Sulyman Stokes, Rebuild Foundation / Kenwood Gardens



Photo courtesy Rebuild Foundation / Kenwood Gardens

Photo by Meagan McNeal, Courtesy Rebuild Foundation / Kenwood Gardens



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This guidebook is the result of scholarly research by TCLF staff, including Charles A. Birnbaum, Barbara S. Christen, Allan Greller, Graylin Harrison, and Bethany Laskin, with editorial and programmatic support by Aileen Beringer, Charles A. Birnbaum, and Nord Wennerstrom. Special thanks go to the project's Advisory Committee, especially Julia Bachrach and Ron Henderson, and Dave Lawrie, Ward Miller, Bradley McCauley, and Doug Williams. Additional assistance was provided by project partner ASLA Illinois—in particular, Stacey Libra and Susan Ragaishis; the Chicago Park District, including Andrew Schneider; Carroll Conway; and local photographer Eric Allix Rogers.

Photography by Charles A. Birnbaum unless otherwise noted.

Left: Photo by Lorie Shauliw