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Englewood, past and present

May 31, 2012

By: John R. Schmidt

Englewood is a mini-Detroit. Well into the second half of the 20th century, the area centered around 63rd and Halsted was dynamic and prosperous. In more recent times, the community has struggled to overcome a host of urban problems.

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(CTA photo)
Halsted and 64th streets, 1955

The history of Englewood begins in the 1850s, with the coming of the railroads. Two lines crossed near what is now 63rd and Wentworth. A settlement called Junction Grove took root near the railroad junction. Some years later, a local real estate developer popularized the name Englewood—after his home town of Englewood, New Jersey.

Most of the early settlers here were German and Irish. Railroad workers lived near the junction, and truck farmers occupied the land to the west. When the Stock Yards opened a few miles up Halsted, many of the people employed there also found homes in Englewood.

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From 1865 to 1889, the area was part of the Town of Lake. The Cook County Normal School and the first Englewood High School were built during these years. Then, in 1889, the City of Chicago annexed Englewood.

Now the community took off. Brick two-flats and apartment buildings joined the older wooden cottages. Banks, schools, hospitals, churches, and other institutions of modern civilization were established. The city streetcar system was extended into the area, and in 1907 Englewood got its own "L" branch. The population passed 90,000 and kept going.



Chicago Landmark: The Yale Apartments--6565 S. Yale Ave.

The focus of the community was 63rd and Halsted. With three major department stores and hundreds of smaller businesses, this became the busiest shopping district outside the Loop. More than that—it was the busiest outlying shopping district in the world. For decades the stores here rang up more sales than many medium-size cities.

Englewood came through the Great Depression and World War II in reasonably good shape. The real challenges developed in the years after 1950. Now more people were driving cars. The general movement was away from the neighborhoods of the inner city.

Shopping malls began drawing traffic away from 63rd-Halsted. The marginal stores closed, and many of the better ones left. The fabulous Southtown Theater, with its duck pond in the lobby, was a major casualty—it was converted into a discount store.



New Kennedy-King campus at Halsted and 64th streets

Meanwhile, expressway construction and urban renewal in other parts of the city displaced many African-Americans. Some of these families settled in Englewood. Panic-peddling and white flight followed. In 1950, blacks were 11 percent of the local population. That number increased to 69 percent in 1960, and 96 percent ten years later.

During the 1970s, the city made a concerted effort to revive the 63rd-Halsted shopping center. Traffic was diverted away from the intersection, and the two key streets became bus-only malls. The experiment failed. The last two anchors, Sears and Wieboldt's, eventually pulled out.

Englewood continued going downhill. The crime rate became one of the highest in the country. More major institutions left. Homes were abandoned or torched, leaving whole blocks empty. By 2000 the population had dwindled to just 40,000. Englewood was looking a lot like—well,

a lot like Detroit.



Apartments and two-flats on Union Avenue

And yet, the community has not given up. Much of the southern section remains stable. Here and there, some houses have been built. In 2007 a new campus for Kennedy-King College opened at 63rd-Halsted. There's hope the college will revive what's left of the shopping district.

If a single building symbolizes Englewood, that would be the South Side Masonic Temple, at 64th and Green. It has been abandoned for years, and several attempts at adaptive re-use have failed. Its future is uncertain.

Yet even with broken windows and falling bricks, the temple is an impressive reminder of past glory. Will it be brought back to life? Will Englewood be brought back to life?

We'll see.



South Side Masonic Temple--6400 S. Green St.

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Gene Meier · 4 months ago

A 19th century ENGLEWOOD panorama about JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION, housed in its original ENGLEWOOD-patent 16-sided rotunda, can be visited at Ste Anne de Beaupre, outside Quebec. This is a very nice site on the internet. I visited Ste Anne de Beaupre several years ago with the International Panorama Committee. Panorama paintings and panorama rotundas like these were made by Reed & Gross (1885-88) and were located from coast-to-coast in USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Europe. Other companies based in Chicago were those of William Wehner (studio in downtown Milwaukee), A.T. Andreas (studios in Chicago, New York, D.C.), Philippoteaux/Willoughby (corporation in Illinois, studios in Brussels, and Mott Haven, The Bronx). Info to share.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



Marcus Robinson · 4 months ago

I also lived in Inglewood and sort of document at the historic buildings I'm on the injured list now but I plan to return back and capture what is still I attended a historic school Perkins bass elementary school it's over 200 years old and his name that the one man when I originally thought it was mean that the two people it sits at 1140 West 66th Street I was the last of the group to be transferred out because it only went up to 6th grade and I was heading into 7th grade I lived in englewood for 41 years and just recently moved due to the high rent I now reside in Washington Heights but there's no other neighborhood like englewood despite its impoverished and high crime rate it is still a unique neighborhood probably because of the history behind it I still go to church there and although I was robbed and beaten in that neighborhood over a camera that belongs to me I do plan on returning but with caution the englewood I grew up in was bad and I remember going into that theater but it wasn't a theater at the time it was cars write a little discount store that failed and I remember seeing the wrecking ball tear down such a beautiful theater that

they should have tried to reopen Kennedy King being there makes the corner to me look ugly weather is going to revive the shop in the area I don't know perhaps if they put a big mall there and call it the englewood mall will the real store and it not Arabian owned but store that will not allow drug dealers for addicts to hang out by

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delorenzodean → Marcus Robinson • 10 days ago

My father and uncles owned and operated a food and liquor store from the mid 60's to mid 70's on the south side of Chicago, located at 913 to 919 west 57th street.

They are first generation Italians and grew up at 57th and Peoria. The name of the store was Bart's Food and Liquors.

I have roughly 3 hours of a sit down interview I did with my dad questioning his experience during that time. I will be doing similar interviews with his 2 brothers. My father is 72 now but initially owned the store when he was 25 years old. His recollections of that time were incredible.

I am curious if you knew my father and was familiar with the store? My father helped a lot of people who lived in the neighborhood I am trying to put enough information together to get a story written about his experiences.

Thank you,

Dean Delorenzo

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T.K → Marcus Robinson • 3 months ago

A lot of memories you shared lot of deep memories i was lucky to see and enjoy the southtown theater (cars department store)it was beautiful the most impressive were the swans my family moved out of englewood at the begining of the 70s ironically i was brought back to englewood by my sales job i to remember the hussle and bussle of 63 and halsted (the second downtown)if you cant find what you came to buy you didnt need it englewood had everything.we lived at 57th and union.i do believe to turn things around

the communities have to bind together get the gangs out and start building new

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Pat Telios Reagan • 9 months ago

I also lived in Englewood on 55th and Garfield Blvd. I lived in Bryne's building mid 60's and went to Oliver Wendell Holmes. My dad had a cafe cllled the Grill on 55th and Halsted next to the grocery store. I have allot of memories living in Englewood.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Gene Meier • a year ago

I am writing the first book from the American point of view about 19th century rotunda panoramas. These were the biggest paintings in the world,50 x 400=20,000 square feet, housed in their own rotundas which were 16-sided polygons. Chicago in 1893 had 6 panorama companies and 6 panorama rotundas. Englewood was home to the Reed & Gross panorama company which between 1885 and 1888 provided units of BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG and JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION for cities from coast to coast and beyond (Australia, Canada,Europe).They also built the CHICAGO FIRE panorama on Michigan between Madison and Monroe. Info to share

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Marcus Robinson → Gene Meier • 4 months ago

where did the company staying in Inglewood and is the building still there today if so tell me where I would love to go photograph it and even if its just a vacant lot or another building been built on it can you pinpoint the location if so hit my line

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Gene Meier → Marcus Robinson • 4 months ago

Hello again, Marcus, a SURVIVING rotunda in North America of the Charles Henry Ritter patent "Dioramic or Panoramic Structure" can be seen on-line at Ste Anne de Beaupre, outside Quebec. I visited this panorama, JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION, several years ago with the International Panorama Committee.

Charles Henry Ritter was a well-known scenic artist in Chicago who helped paint panoramas for Reed & Gross in Englewood 1885-88.

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Gene Meier → Marcus Robinson · 4 months ago

Hi Marcus, the mailing address of the Reed & Gross cyclorama company was their residence at 425 61st Street. Reed & Gross were brothers in law. Their rotunda (50 x 400=20,000 square feet) stood 5 stories high and had 16 sides, a temporary building. It stood within walking distance of 425 61st Street, but the exact location is not listed in the Lakeside City Directory of Chicago or the Town of Lake Directories 1885-88. An image of the rotunda can be found in GOOGLE PATENTS: Charles Henry Ritter of Chicago, Illinois, "Dioramic or Panoramic Structure". This Ritter patent was used by Reed & Gross in several of their panorama venues in USA and in Australia. Portland, Oregon, has an on-line image (the block bounded by Fourth Street to the north, Third Street to the south, Pine Street to the west, Ash Street to the East). I have much info to share. genemeier@frontier.com

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Tom Kelley · 2 years ago

I grew up in Englewood from 1947/1963 went to Visitation grammar school on 63rd St. you could buy anything from groceries to shoes we lived at 5711 S Union had many friends Danie Miller Bob Faust Kevin Kearns. yes Virginia you can't go back.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Brewster → Tom Kelley · a year ago

I, too, went to Visitation Grammar School graduating 1955. I had pals on Union Ave., Lowe Ave from 5600 to 5800. I still have them on my call list and keep in contact with them, if names as Towey, Gardner, Mosovelo, Frank, Regan ring a bell for they lived on Union between 5700 and 5800. I lived on the corner of 58

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Brewster · 10 months ago



L.R. Brewster · 10 months ago

I lived two houses away from the Mosovelos, gerry went to vis. Also if you are saying Towey I knew Mike Towey he lived near or next to the garefield theater that was just orth of 55th st.on the east side of the street do you remember LeMecks restaurant.?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jim o → Tom Kelley · a year ago

Tom, I was at 67th and Marshfield, lived in the Bryne's Building, attended Visitation 1955-1959--attended Quigley, QPS '60

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



mznatnat · 2 years ago

No it will not be brought back to life. Sadly. I would love to see it happen though. We need more investors to step forward.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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