

## History and Related Facts of the City of Chicago Heights

### History

The area on which Chicago Heights currently sits was originally inhabited by the Illini, Iroquois, and later Potawatomi tribes. The first permanent white settler was Adam Brown, who set down in 1833 at the juncture of the Hubbard Trail (going from Vincennes to Fort Dearborn) and the Sauk Trail which was used by the native tribes for trading and hunting. This is the present day corner of Sauk Trail and Chicago Ave. in South Chicago Heights.

For the next 20 odd years, more pioneers (and squatters) made the area home, calling their settlement *Thorn Grove* due to the profusion of native Thorn apple trees. The name was changed to *Bloom* in 1849 by German settlers in honor of Robert Bluehm, a German patriot who was executed in Vienna in 1848. Farmers and residents were attracted to Bloom during the next few years with the completion of railroad stations along the Joliet & Northern (1853) and Chicago & Eastern Illinois (1869) lines.

It wasn't until the dawn of the 1890's that a syndicate of foresighted capitalists, realizing the important role that railroads would have on industry, bought up much of the land around the two railroads. Developers convinced residents to change the name to "Chicago" so as to associate it with its booming neighbor to the north (a wise marketing strategy for attracting business) and "Heights" because the location is one of the highest in the county. The village was incorporated and the name of *Chicago Heights* was officially adopted September 24, 1892.

The community continued to grow and prosper during the turn of the century due to the railroads and the construction of the Lincoln and Dixie Highways. As more and more industry was drawn to the area, so too were immigrant workers. Europeans of many nationalities, Mexicans, and African-Americans moving from the southern U.S. all made their way to Chicago Heights. Of course, this rapid growth also brought less desirable consequences as well. Bootlegging had a firm hold in the city during prohibition, bringing with it organized crime and one of the community's most famous residents, Al Capone. However, after prohibition was repealed, the city enjoyed its most prosperous period. Between 1940 and 1970 the population grew to over 40,000. Major industries, such as Ford Motor Company set up shop and downtown shopping, restaurants, and entertainment attracted people from miles around.

Since the 1970's, the community has been hurt by some of the very things that contributed to its boom. The Interstate Highway System transferred shopping and entertainment to communities west and east of the city near I-57 or I-65. Also, the movement of heavy industry oversees throughout the U.S. has affected Chicago Heights deeply, although not as much as some Chicago Suburbs. As of 2010, population has dropped to around 30,000 and maintains an unemployment rate higher than Illinois at large.

However, recently there has been cause for optimism. Portions of the downtown area have been refurbished; including the addition of a PACE bus transfer station, new lighting, and attractive landscaping. More improvements are in the planning stages. During 2011 a new housing development began southeast of Lincoln Highway and a major grocery chain entered the market, creating much needed jobs.

### Facts

**Location:** 24 miles directly south of the Chicago Loop and 8 miles south of Chicago's city limits. 9.57 square miles.

**Area:** The boundaries are roughly - east to west; between Western Avenue and ½ mile east of State Street and north to south; between Volmer Road and E. 26<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Altitude:** 640 to 710 feet above sea level (One of the highest locations in the immediate area). Lake Michigan is at 580 feet above sea level for comparison.

**Population:** 30,412 (Census estimate for 2009)

- Chicago Heights is a diverse city. According to the U.S. Census for 2000 (\*2010 numbers have not been made available yet), the city is made up of:
  - Black (37.9%), Hispanic (23.8%), White Non-Hispanic (21.2%), Other race (13.5%), Two or more races (2.7%), American Indian (0.8%)

**Government:** The Chicago Heights government is comprised of a weak mayor and seven ward aldermen. Public safety is ensured through the Chicago Heights Police Department, which includes 78 sworn personnel plus 28 civilian personnel. The Chicago Heights Fire Department operates five stations and has 66 full-time and 25 paid-on-call firefighters.

**Fun Fact:** Chicago Heights has been home to many famous residents. Some of them include John Stossel (investigative journalist), Bret Saberhagen (major league baseball player), Julian Wright (NBA), Craig Hodges (NBA), Rodney Harrison (NFL), Mike Downey (L.A. Times and Chicago Tribune sports columnist), and of course Al Capone (infamous gangster).