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Lower West Side

As you drive south from Chicago's West Side there is a transition from the campus landscape of the University of Illinois to a working class industrial setting. The transition takes place roughly at the railway lines that run parallel to West 16th Street. This is the northern boundary of the [Lower West Side](#), and the area known as [Pilsen](#). There are some noteworthy buildings in Pilsen, together with Victorian and early twentieth century neighborhood shops and homes. To the south of Pilsen the landscape becomes increasingly industrial as you cross West Cermak Road and approach the South Branch of the Chicago River, which flows along the southern boundary of the Lower West Side

On my first visit to Pilsen I was heading for what is arguably its best known building; [Thalia Hall](#), a monumental Romanesque style building built in 1893, and located at the intersection of South Alport Street and West 18th Street. There was some scaffolding on the exterior of the building when I visited. It is apparently getting a little TLC. At the corner of the Hall there is a convenient cafe, which provides an opportunity to recharge and get a sense of the interior decor. On the opposite side of 18th Street is St. Procopius Church, another Romanesque style building, a decade older than Thalia Hall. There are other interesting nearby buildings on South Alport Street and it is worth walking a block to the north and south. Of particular interest to the south is [Iglesia Presbiteriana Emmanuel](#), a small neoclassical structure that was built in 1965, but has the appearance of something much older.

West 18th Street is one of the more commercial streets in Pilsen. If you walk or drive from Thalia Hall to the west along 18th street you come to Blue Island Avenue, and the commercial heart of the Lower West Side. At the intersection there is a vintage war memorial, and immediately to the south, on the west side of the avenue, there is a colorful cluster of [neighborhood stores and flats](#).

I have an interest in vintage industrial architecture, and therefore spent some time driving around the area close to the South Branch of the Chicago River. A good spot to head for is the [West Cermak Road Bridge](#). From this typical rust-red Chicago river bridge there is a good view of an 8 storied riverside warehouse, which dates from 1895, and has now been converted into lofts. Just behind this building, on South Lumber Street, there are a number of other nice [industrial buildings](#) from the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries.

From Cermak Road, the river heads southwest to the Dan Ryan Expressway, and then roughly west to "Bubbly Creek" at Ashland Avenue. I was driving north on Ashland Avenue when I spotted on my right the [Canal Origins Park](#) which overlooks Bubbly Creek. The park is small, but it was worth stopping and taking a look. It has a prairie, colorful in summer, and a good view of this part of the [Chicago River](#). The bubbles, once produced by decomposing entrails dumped into the river from the local stockyards, are gone along with the stockyards and the entrails. Now the creek is a quiet backwater favored by local anglers. After spending a few minutes in the park I crossed Ashland Avenue and walked a short distance north to the [Ashland Avenue Bridge](#). From here there is a trail along the river to the west. The walk, which is pleasant enough, passes a glittering scrap metal yard on the other side of the river, and then ends up at some railway tracks and a derelict [silo complex](#).

Finally, there is one other park that should be briefly mentioned; Dvorak Park. Briefly, because I found it rather non-descript apart from its classic [1908 Field House](#).

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