The German community

German families began settling in Back of the Yards in the 1870s. Many worked as skilled butchers in the meat packing plants west of the Union Stock Yard.

In 1879, German Catholics founded St. Augustine parish at South Laflin and 50th Streets as a mission of St. Anthony of Padua Parish at 24th and Canal Streets. The Franciscan Order took charge of the parish in 1886.

German Protestants worshipped at St. Martini Lutheran Church after 1884, which was located to the west of St. Augustine's on 51st Street at Marshfield Avenue. The Lutheran congregation grew rapidly, increasing from its seventeen original members to over 2,000 by 1900. Both St. Augustine and St. Martini opened parochial schools, and St. Augustine High School opened in 1911.

Both parishes have closed: St. Augustine closed in 1990 and its church has been demolished. Today, the St. Augustine High School building remains active is part of Chicago Public Schools' Richards Career Academy. St. Martini closed in 2005 and is now Spiritual Rock M.B. Church.

Two Franciscan priests, Father Roch Hettinger and Father Conrad Motola, plan the St. Augustine festival in 1960.

Image courtesy of the Archives and Records of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

ST. AUGUSTINE CHOIR

First Row: Rose Bruck, Marcia Zeilner, Anna Eichten, Director Albert G. Tushaus, Frances H. Mazurk, Sylvia Wehlisch, Elizabeth Simon,

Second Row: Mary Cvetan, Rita Dell, Therese Girten, Norma Wehlisch, Anne Garber, Agnes Girten, Clara Wagner, Jeanine Greene, Catherine Adam,

Third Row: Anthony Reinert, Frank Nowakowski, Anthony Pietsch, Ronald Knecht, Richard Ehrlicher, Chris Thelen, Louis Hahn, Arthur Becht, Frank Streich, Arthur Schmitz.

The St. Augustine choir sits for a photo that was published in the parish's 75th anniversary book in 1954. The choir remained largely German into the 1960s.

Image courtesy of the Archives and Records of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

German community spotlight:
St. Augustine picnickers at Oswald's Grove

Located at the southwest corner of 52nd and Halsted Streets, Oswald's Grove was a favorite gathering place for several ethnic groups, especially the Irish and Germans, who predominated in the area at that time. The park also served as a location for labor picnics, political rallies, and other celebrations.

Oswald's Grove opened in 1873 as Sharpshooters Park and later became an amusement park called Luna Park, which opened in 1907 and closed in 1911. For a short period, the city operated a public food market on the site. The Oswald family sold the ten-acre plot in 1916 to be developed for homes.

Today, the southwest corner of 52nd and Halsted Streets is an unimproved parcel surrounded by chain-linked fencing. A one-acre City park known as Park 421 is located a block south at 53rd and Halsted Streets. The name Luna Park lives on as a neighborhood park in Englewood on 56th Street, about a half mile from the original site of Oswald's Grove.

Parishioners from St. Augustine picnic at Oswald's Grove ca. 1890.

Image courtesy of the Chicago History Museum.