

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



# Germania Club Building

100-114 West Germania Place / 1538-1542 North Clark Street

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**Final Landmark Recommendation adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, August 5, 2010**



**CITY OF CHICAGO**  
**Richard M. Daley, Mayor**

**Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning**  
**Patricia A. Scudiero, Commissioner**

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose ten members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.*

*The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.*

*This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.*

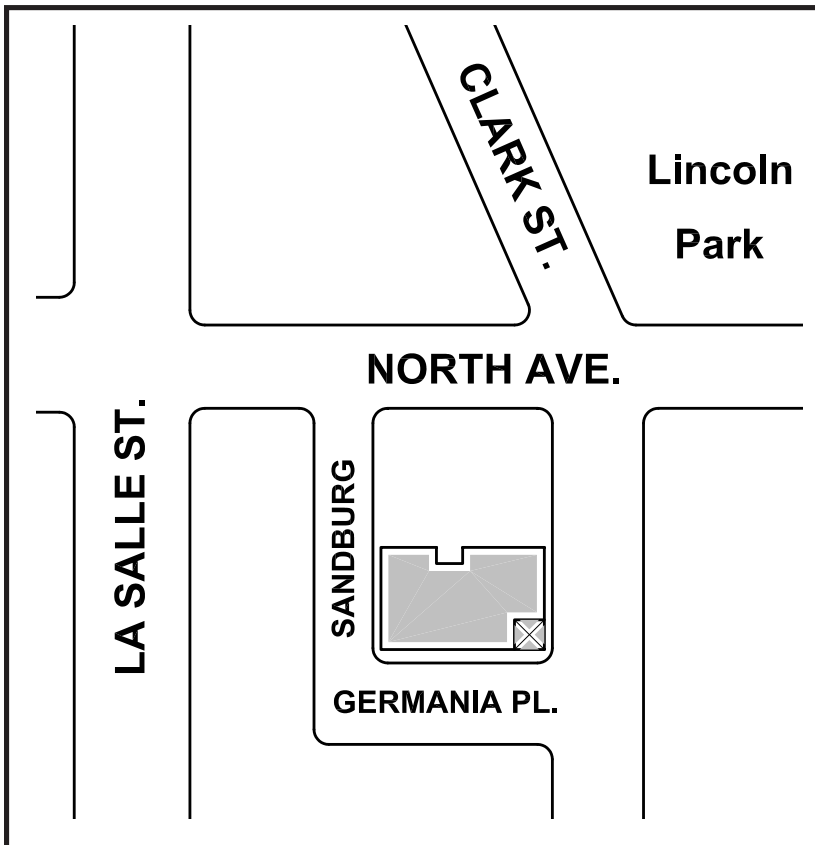
# GERMANIA CLUB BUILDING

108 W. Germania Place

**Date:** 1888 – 1889  
**Architect:** Addison & Fiedler

The grandly-scaled Germania Club Building, located on the Near North Side at the corner of Clark Street and Germania Place, is one of Chicago's best-remaining examples of a once-popular building type—the neighborhood club. Built by prominent members of Chicago's German-American community in 1889, the building's distinctive Victorian-era architecture and abundance of ornamental detail stand in contrast with its immediate surroundings of the post-war high-rises of Sandburg Village. The building is also unusual for its fine, intact historic interior spaces.

From its completion in 1889 through much of the twentieth century, the Germania Club Building served as a focal point for Chicago's German-American community, the city's most populous ethnic group at the turn of the last century. The cultural, charitable and civic activities which took place at the Germania Club convey aspects of the history of the German-American



Located on the Near North Side, the Germania Club Building is an outstanding and rare example of a nineteenth century club building. In addition to its architectural significance, the building is closely associated with the history of the German-American community in Chicago and the importance of ethnic identity in the city's history.

community in Chicago, and more broadly the importance of ethnic identity in the city's economic development, and social and cultural history.

## EARLY HISTORY OF THE GERMANIA CLUB

In the mid-nineteenth century, a declining agricultural economy and political unrest following the failed democratic revolutions of 1848 in Germany compelled many Germans to emigrate to the United States. Germans had been among the first Europeans to settle in Chicago, and as early as the 1850s they were one of the city's largest ethnic groups, rivaled only by the Irish. By the American Civil War, Germans made up 40.5 percent of all foreign-born inhabitants in the city.

The 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s saw this number swell enormously, with more than 300,000 German-speaking immigrants arriving in Chicago during those three decades. By 1900 native-born Germans and their descendants comprised almost a quarter of the city's population. Compared to other ethnic groups in Chicago, the German-American community was unusually diverse with a range of social classes and ages, an interest in politics across the political spectrum, and varied opinions on how far the community should assimilate into their adopted country.

Despite this diversity, German-Americans were well-known for their active participation in clubs, a propensity noted by a president of the Germania Club who commented, "put three Germans together and in five minutes you'll have four clubs." At their peak, there were at least 452 German clubs in Chicago including professional societies, organizations of skilled tradesmen, clubs based on one's geographic origin in Germany, gymnastic clubs (or *turnverein*), clubs dedicated to study of science and letters, and musical choirs. To some degree, they all sought to maintain German culture, to foster social connections, and to serve charitable causes. Many of these German clubs were short-lived; the Germania Club was unusual in its staying power and prominence.

The origins of the Germania Club date to 1865, when a group of German Civil War veterans sang at ceremonies held at the Chicago Court House as President Lincoln's funeral bier passed through Chicago on route to Springfield. In the same year, this informal chorus of 60 singers performed a second concert to benefit wounded Civil War soldiers, and in 1867 staged a concert to benefit a Jewish orphanage. In 1869, the singers formally incorporated as the *Germania Männerchöre* (German men's chorus), adding to the number of German music societies already established in the city including the Orpheus, Swiss, Teutonia, Frohsinn, Liederkransz, and Chicago Männerchöre. In conjunction and competition with numerous other German music clubs, the *Germania Männerchöre* contributed to the development of musical culture in the city.

In its early years, the *Germania Männerchöre* was led by Hans Balatka under whose direction the chorus staged ambitious concerts and achieved semi-professional status. A contemporary review of an 1870 performance by the chorus at Crosby's Opera Hall described a chorus of 100 male and female voices, and a 45-piece orchestra which "challenged professional troupes."





The Germania Club traces its roots to a men's chorus made up of German-American Civil War veterans who sang at President Lincoln's funeral ceremonies in Chicago. Left, the funeral procession enters Chicago's courthouse on May 1, 1865.



Above: From the 1860s through the 1880s, the *Germania Männerchöre* performed at various locations throughout the city, including Crosby's Opera House. The club remained without a building of its own for the first 25 years of its existence.



Right: The program for a summer concert by the *Germania Männerchöre* in July 1867 included 12 works by German composers performed by the chorus and an orchestra. The evening was to conclude with a "grand hop" until 1:30 a.m.

According to the review, at the conclusion of the performance, audience applause resulted in the first curtain call on the Chicago stage.

The early activities of the *Germania Männerchöre* also established the choir's reputation as the club of the German-American upper class and elite society. Its annual winter masquerade ball was the "*ne plus ultra* of anything of the kind ever produced in this city" according to an 1873 review in the *Chicago Tribune*. Contemporary press reports described the menus, dance programs, "fashionable people and gorgeous costumes" of these balls in elaborate detail.

In summer months the chorus participated in outdoor concerts, such as a festival in Ogden's Grove in 1870 which brought together 32 German music clubs in a concert to support the German cause in the Franco-Prussian War a continent away. Another "moonlight picnic performance" in the summer of 1873 was described as "a scene of domestic enjoyment, showing that gentleman and ladies can meet together and listen to music and drink a little beer without being riotous."

Despite its musical accomplishments, the *Männerchöre* had no club building for the first 25 years of its existence. During this time, most of the chorus met and performed in rented halls such as *das Deutches Haus* (the German Hall), located in the heart of an early Near North Side German community at Grand Avenue and Wells Street, and Crosby's Opera House on Washington Street between State and Dearborn. After these buildings were destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871, the chorus rented rehearsal and meeting space in a series of halls in the area.

As the *Männerchöre* began to extend its activities to include other social and recreational pursuits, it decided to construct its own building. In 1886 the club purchased a parcel of land from Chicago restaurateur Philip Henrici. Located at Clark and Grant (now Germania Place) Streets, it was a prime location for the new club, one block from Lincoln Park and in the heart of the oldest and largest settlement of German-Americans in Chicago. As early as the 1850s, a German neighborhood had arisen north of Chicago Avenue and east of Clark Street, where many new immigrants had established breweries and other businesses. Others had established small farms in the area now known as the Old Town Triangle, west of Clark Street. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, many of these Germans moved farther north to the Lincoln Park neighborhood and to Lake View, a suburb that was annexed to Chicago in 1889. At the turn of the century, Germans were a dominant force on the North Side, forming a majority of citizens in the area bounded by Division, Belmont, Lake Michigan, and the Chicago River. Wealthy German businessmen built fine homes near Lincoln Park and Lake Michigan, while middle- and working-class families lived in small, affordable cottages and flat buildings further to the west.

The location was also close to the section of North Avenue between Clark Street and Clybourn Avenue that by the late-nineteenth century had become the commercial spine of this German neighborhood, earning the nickname "German Broadway." A former president of the North Avenue Business and Improvement Association (William Rauen, in a 1930 interview) recalled it as a bustling street by 1890, built up with dozens of stores, including clothiers, shoemakers, confectioners, tobacco shops, druggists, bakers and grocers. Rauen remembered: "The

language spoken along the street was nine-tenths German and there was no occasion for folks from Trier, Luxembourg, the Rhineland and Bavaria to feel homesick.” A columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* (Alex Small, 1957) remembered that during the street’s heyday, “One could not get around North Avenue without that language [German].”

By 1888 the membership of the *Germania Männerchöre* had raised \$100,000 through a private bond issue and hired the architectural firm of Addison & Fiedler to design a new club building. An early promotional brochure for the fundraising efforts calculated that a club of 600 members—a fraction of the German population in Chicago—each paying 20 cents a day could “enjoy the luxuriousness of club life.”

In July 1888, the *Building Budget* announced that plans for the *Germania Männerchöre*’s new club building were nearly completed. The following September a public ceremony was arranged for the setting of the building’s cornerstone. At the ceremony, Mayor John A. Roche’s speech praised the club membership for raising a “monument to social happiness,” but also alluded to the degree of assimilation of the German-American community: “You are now American citizens—some of you by birth, but many of you only by choice—and by becoming good citizens and performing well the duties of citizenship you honor both the fatherland and the land of your adoption.” Questions of assimilation and patriotism would reoccur throughout the club’s history.

## **BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

The Germania Club Building was completed by the following spring, and on April 7, 1889, another ceremony was held for its dedication. A forward-looking speech by the German Consul in Chicago envisioned a time “when age shall have dimmed the luster of the hall,” but that it would remain the first monument to the German-American community in Chicago.

According to guidebooks at the time it was built, the Germania was regarded as one of the most handsome clubs in the city. At four stories tall with a building footprint of 100 by 150 feet, it was much larger than the other brick stores and residential flats that lined this section of Clark Street. Its large third-story windows exaggerated the building’s volume, and its exterior was suffused with rich materials and picturesque details. Even during a period when embellished architecture was the norm, the Germania Club stood out.

The two principal facades are divided into a series of structural bays, four along Clark Street and six on Germania Place. The ground floor of the building contains street-level storefronts with separate entrances from the sidewalk. The two-story base of the building is clad in alternating bands of smooth and rusticated limestone, a trademark of architect Fiedler’s later school designs in Chicago. The variety of decorated forms and designs of the upper stories are rendered in deep-red face brick, unglazed red terra cotta, and pressed-metal ornament.





Left: A pre-construction rendering of the Germania Club Building was published in the *Building Budget* in 1888. The bell-cast roof and parapet finials were not constructed as part of the final design.



Left: A very early photograph of the building published in 1900 in a collection of 100 photographs of Chicago. The original configuration of the open porch is visible on the Clark Street elevation.



Left: A 1996 photograph of the building, unchanged from how it appears today.

Right: The cover of the program for the dedication of the Germania Club Building on April 6, 1889. Note that the association was still referring to itself as the *Germania Männerchöre* (German men's chorus).

Below: Terra-cotta, masonry, and pressed-metal details of the building.



Each bay of the building is articulated with a pressed-metal classical pediment over a pair of tall arched windows. The terra-cotta columns and pilasters between the window openings are decorated with a combination of foliate and classical ornament, and terra-cotta tiles are arranged in a nail-head pattern above the windows. The frieze at the attic story of the building is a series of metal and brick panels divided by metal columns. The projecting cornice is topped with a raised parapet, both in pressed metal. These existing decorative metal elements and the pressed-metal ornament at the pediments date from 1987, replacing deteriorated original decoration. Though sympathetic to the original design, historic photographs of the building indicate that these features were originally more richly ornamented.

A prominent feature of the building is the pyramidal roof at its southeast corner, visible from several blocks south of the building on Clark Street. Another distinctive feature is the long projecting window bay supported by massive limestone brackets on the Clark Street elevation of the building. The 50'-long bay was originally used as an open porch connecting some of the club's smaller reception rooms with the outdoors. The porch was enclosed sometime after 1904, but the highly ornamental metal grillwork of the original porch railing was retained. On the Germania Place elevation, a projecting stone porch with classical columns frames the main entrance of the club. The southwestern-most bay of the Germania Place elevation also contains a terra-cotta sculptural panel with figures depicting a musical allegory.

The architectural details of the building are representative of the exceptional craftsmanship for which German tradesmen of this period were known. The terra cotta used on the exterior, for example, was supplied by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company. Founded in 1877 by German and Austrian immigrants and located in the city's Lake View neighborhood, Northwestern was one of the largest and most highly-acclaimed manufacturers of terra cotta in the United States through the 1930s.

### *Interior*

The vertical arrangement of the building separates the street-level storefronts from the club spaces on the upper floors. The basement at the rear of the building originally contained a bowling alley, and the club's kitchen and is currently a retail space. The street-level retail storefronts, with separate entrances from the sidewalk on Clark Street, continue to function as originally designed. The primary entrance to the club's interior spaces is located slightly above grade at the Germania Place elevation and opens into a vestibule with stairs leading to a first-floor foyer. A staircase continues up to a mezzanine level with three historic club rooms connected *enfilade* through a sequence of historic pocket doors. Historic features of these rooms include the majority of the trim, wainscoting, and leaded-glass transom windows, and a classical-style mantle piece. Though the historic function of these mezzanine rooms is unknown, early descriptions of this part of the club identified a choral practice room, private dining rooms, and a library. The mezzanine also includes the enclosed porch with its historic stone and wrought-iron structure visible on the interior.

Continuing up from the mezzanine, the grand staircase leads to the second-floor foyer which includes a stained glass window acquired by the club at the World's Columbian Exposition (described in further detail below). The foyer opens into the club's primary spaces on the second floor which include a large ballroom, a dining room with a stage, and a solarium at the



**Right: The interior of the ballroom on the occasion of a visit by West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in April 1953. The Rococo-style “Glory of Germania” at the far end of the room was a ceramic masterpiece originally manufactured in Germany for the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 and donated to the club after the fair. The work was removed from the building in 1986.**



**Right: The ballroom as it appears today, showing the open third-floor gallery. The room, including its original plaster and wood details, remains virtually unchanged.**



**Below: Current view of the ballroom.**





**Above: The main dining room at the Germania Club was designed to accommodate 400 persons. The elevated stage, with its half dome, is the focal point of the room.**



**Right: The dining room stage decorated for a celebration in 1908 commemorating the 20th year of William II's reign as the German Emperor and King of Prussia.**



**Left: Historic details in the dining room including wood wainscoting, interior doors, and trim, and garlands in ornamental plaster.**





**Above: an original carved-wood mantel piece, wainscoting, and original windows in a former club room on the mezzanine level.**



**Above: The masonry pier and heavy door frame of the formerly open porch, now enclosed on the mezzanine level.**

**Below: Part of the grand stairway which travels from the street-level entrance to the third floor gallery level.**



**Below: windows on the mezzanine level include leaded art glass transoms, original pivot casements, and carved mullions.**

corner of the building connecting these spaces. Dance was second only to music in importance at the Germania Club, and in 1895 the *Tribune* described the ballroom as a “huge dancing hall . . . the largest and finest in the city.” The double-height space measures 100’ by 50’ and is uninterrupted by columns. The hardwood dance floor remains, and if oral history is to be believed, may have been mounted on springs to invigorate dancers. Running along the north side of the ballroom is the third-floor gallery which occupies the partial third floor of the building. Open to the ballroom below, the gallery space accommodated an orchestra during the club’s dances. The large arched doorways at the east end of the ballroom open into the formal main dining room elevated three steps up from the ballroom. The ballroom and dining room are also connected by a solarium with large south and east-facing windows. Designed to seat 400, the dining room includes an elevated stage at one end. The impressive volume of both the ballroom and dining room is complemented by restrained Classical Revival-style decoration. Large wall areas are ornamented with pilasters, molding, and half-round arches. The ceilings are similarly accented with beams and domed recesses finished in gold leaf. The majority of the trim, ornamental plaster, and paneled wainscoting, as well as many of interior doors in these two rooms, are original.

*Architect W. August Fiedler (1843-1903)*

The design of the building is directly attributed to W. August Fiedler (1843-1903), a partner of the firm of Addison & Fiedler and a member of the Germania Club. Fiedler was born in Elbin, Germany and immigrated to the United States in 1866 and came to Chicago in 1874 to participate in the post-Fire reconstruction of the city. His involvement represents the great impact of German-born architects who immigrated to Chicago in the 19th century, including Dankmar Adler, Adolph A. Cudell, Paul Gerhardt, and Louis Guenzel.

Trained as a furniture maker, Fiedler arrived in New York City in 1866 and moved to Chicago in 1874, where he soon founded A. Fiedler & Co., “Designer and Manufacturer of Artistic Furniture.” His clients included many of the city’s social elite, and one of his most lavish interior designs was done for banker Samuel Nickerson. According to a contemporary account, the Nickerson House’s rich variety of interior decoration “reached a standard of excellence never before attained in Chicago” (*Inland Architect*, Feb. 1883). Located at 40 E. Erie St., the Nickerson House is a designated Chicago Landmark.

During the last half of the 1880s, Fiedler became a partner with architect John Addison, who also was known for his “Modern Gothic” designs. Their practice included a variety of residential designs, as well as the prestigious Germania Club commission. Following the completion of the Germania Club, Fiedler began an independent practice in 1890. Three years later he accepted the position of supervising architect for the Chicago Board of Education. In this capacity, he designed more than a dozen public schools, including: the Goethe School (2236 N. Rockwell Ave., 1895); the Komensky School (1925 S. Throop St., 1890); the McCosh School (now Emmett Till School, 6543 S. Champlain Ave., 1894); the Bass School (1140 W. 66<sup>th</sup> St., 1895); the Funston School (3616 W. Armitage Ave., 1895); and the Pickard School (2301 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Pl.; 1896).



The Germania Club Building was designed by architect W. August Fiedler (left), a German immigrant and a member of the club. Later in his career Fiedler was appointed as the supervising architect for the Chicago Board of Education where he oversaw the construction of a number of schools, including Goethe School in 1895 (above).



Above: A circa 1860 residence in Berlin in the German Neoclassical style of architecture. The design of the Germania Club incorporates features of this style, including the banded treatment at the base, the projecting pediment, the pronounced entrance, and the ornamental frieze and cornice.



Left: A history and guide to Chicago published in 1895 described the Germania Club Building as "one of the handsomest [clubs] in Chicago." It is illustrated with the Chicago Athletic Association, the Standard Club (demolished), and the first Union League Club Building (demolished).



One of Addison's most noted commissions as an independent architect was the expansion of the West Side Grounds (Taylor and Wolcott Streets; 1896), the home of the Chicago Cubs until the team moved to Wrigley Field in 1916.

### *Architectural Style*

In the manner of most club architecture, the high quality architecture of the Germania was intended to promote the status of the club and its members. The building has an eclectic design character, combining features of Victorian-era Romanesque styling with elements of German Neoclassicism. The massive appearance of the walls—a two-story Bedford limestone base, with dark-red pressed-brick above—together with the round arches of the top story are aspects of the Romanesque style of architecture that was common in Chicago during the 1880s and 90s.

The Germania Club's design also includes classical forms, most prominently its entrance portico, the projecting triangular pediments, and the cornice supported by a series of small columns and brackets. Architecture inspired by antiquity was prevalent in Germany during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries largely through the aesthetic influence of Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841). This flourish of German Neoclassicism would have been familiar to Fiedler and other Chicago architects who had emigrated from Germany. Pure examples of German Neoclassicism are rare in the United States, but its influence is visible in Fiedler's design of the Germania Club.

As a massive masonry building employing historic styles of architecture, the Germania Club is comparable to schools, apartment blocks, meeting halls, and government and institutional buildings of the same period. Specific examples include: Yondorf Hall (758 W. North Ave.; 1887), a German-American public hall; the Armour Institute Building (3300 S. Federal St.; 1891-93); and the Hotel St. Benedict Flats (40-52 E. Chicago Ave.; 1882-83).

### *Neighborhood Club Buildings in Chicago*

The Germania Club Building reflects the long-standing tradition of Chicagoans forming clubs and organizations of all kinds and sizes for a variety of purposes, and club buildings were a distinctive part of the city's neighborhood landscape in the late-nineteenth century. Although many neighborhood clubs in Chicago rented meeting space, several well-established organizations built and maintained their own buildings. The *Rand, McNally & Co.'s Bird's Eye Views and Guide to Chicago* from 1893 listed approximately twenty clubs with their own buildings. They included ones dedicated to such specialties as boating (the Argo Club and Farragut Boat Club); cycling (Chicago Cycling, Illinois Cycling, and Lincoln Cycling clubs); literature and fine arts (the Menoken club); politics (Hamilton, Iroquois, Lincoln and Marquette clubs); and ethnic groups (Germania, Lakeside, and Standard clubs).

These often were among the grander-scaled buildings in their neighborhoods, extending over several building lots and reaching three or four stories in height. The size and architectural quality of club buildings were no doubt intended to showcase the social class and accomplishments of the club members. Among the most ostentatious designs were the Calumet (26<sup>th</sup> and Michigan, demolished) and the first Standard (24<sup>th</sup> and Michigan, demolished) clubs. Examples of architecturally and historically significant club buildings which survive include the



The design of the Germania Club combines Romanesque styling with elements of German Neoclassicism. The massive appearance of the walls, consisting of a two-story Bedford limestone base with dark-red pressed-brick above, together with the round arches of the top story, are aspects of the Romanesque style of architecture that was common in Chicago during the 1880s and '90s. Neoclassical details include the pediments, bracketed cornice, and portico (left). Below: a detail of the fine ornamental metal railing of the original balcony.





Chicago Club (Michigan and Van Buren St.), and Union League Club (65 W. Jackson Blvd.), however, these buildings are from the early twentieth century, and grew out of the political and business social climate of Chicago's Loop. The Germania Club shares with these the same grandly-scaled architecture, but it is distinctive for its age, neighborhood location, and its association with a particular ethnic group.

## LATER HISTORY OF THE GERMANIA CLUB

Compared to other ethnic neighborhood clubs, the Germania Club was unusual for its longevity, occupying the building for 97 years until the dissolution of the club in 1986. During this period, the activities and challenges of the club illuminate aspects of the history of Chicago's German-American community.

In 1902 the *Germania Männerchöre* name was dropped in favor of the Germania Club, perhaps as a reflection of the club's inclusion of women as members and its family orientation. An 1891 article in the *Chicago Tribune* noted that "there is not a club in Chicago where the ladies have so many privileges and are freely admitted to membership." Each year the club staged a lavish Christmas festival for children, and in 1891 this annual celebration featured the first electrically-lit Christmas tree in Chicago.

Throughout its history, the club was also host to many dignitaries and celebrities, including scientist Albert Einstein, composer Richard Strauss, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Berlin Philharmonic conductor Herbert Von Karajan, boxer Max Schmelling, and Prince Heinrich of Prussia, the brother of German Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The collection of fine art became an important activity of the club. Over the years, the club procured a substantial collection of German arts and crafts, including paintings, sculpture, porcelains, stained glass, and other objects. The collection began at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 when the club bought several paintings by German artists exhibited at the fair. An enormous ceramic mural entitled "The Glory of Germania" also exhibited at German Exhibition in the Manufactures Building became the most well known object in the club's collection. Visitors to the fair nicknamed the work "porcelain porch," and when the fair closed the piece was donated to the Germania Club by the German government. It occupied the west wall of the ballroom until the building was sold in 1986.

The Germania Club's art collection was removed from the building when the club sold the building in 1986, with the exception of a stained glass window located in the second floor foyer next to the ballroom. Approximately nine feet in height, the window was commissioned by the German government for the World's Columbian Exposition and was manufactured by Heinrich Beiler Stained Glass Works (*Glasmalerei*) in Heidelberg, Germany. After the fair, the window was installed in the Madlener-Leight house. When that building was demolished in 1961, the window was acquired by the Germania Club at auction. Numerous examples of Beiler's work from the late-nineteenth century are documented in small parish churches in Germany, and another Beiler work from 1891 is in the collection of the Smith Museum of Stained Glass in



The development of an art collection became an important activity of the club beginning in 1893 when it acquired several works by German artists exhibited at the World's Columbian Exposition. After the fair closed, the German government donated the large porcelain work entitled the "Glory of Germania" to the Club. The work was originally exhibited at the Manufactures Building of the fair (upper right). The piece remained in the ballroom at the Germania Club (right) until the club closed in 1986, after which it was removed.



The stained glass window (left) was commissioned by the German government for exhibition at the Pavilion of Fine Arts at the World's Fair. After the fair, it was installed in the Madlener-Leight House until the window was purchased by the Germania Club at auction in 1961. It remains in the building in the foyer near the main ballroom. The window was manufactured by Heinrich Beiler Stained Glass Works in Heidelberg, Germany (above). A number of Beiler's windows are documented in parish churches in Germany.

Chicago. The window at the Germania Club depicts *Terpsichore*, the ancient Greek muse of choral song and dance, and another female figure, possibly *Germania*, a romantic personification of the German nation. With its finely painted details and deep, saturated colors the window is an excellent example of German stained glass from this period.

In 1893 the *New York Times* noted that the membership of the Germania Club included “nearly all of the Germans of prominence of both political parties in the city.” Although the majority of the members were German-Americans, it should be noted that the membership of the club was not entirely German. In 1892 nearly one-fifth of the members were “Anglo-American.” Nevertheless, the club was exclusive, drawing members from the Chicago elite. Many members were prominent civic and business leaders, including: Lake View mayor William Boldenweck; Chicago mayors Fred Busse and DeWitt Cregier; architects Adolph Cudell, L. Gustav Hallberg, and Richard E. Schmidt; Frederick Hild, chief of the Chicago Public Library system; distiller Albert Madlener; brewer Peter Schoenhofen; Charles Wacker, the first chair of the Chicago Plan Commission; transit magnate Charles Tyson Yerkes; and William DeVry, founder of the DeVry Institute of Technology; and, perhaps most prominently, Governor John Peter Altgeld.

While the Germania Club claimed to be apolitical, Altgeld’s membership indicates otherwise. He spoke at several club events, though some members were concerned that Altgeld was using the club to promote his political agenda. In 1893 Altgeld’s pardon of three imprisoned Haymarket defendants outraged some members of the club—the Board of Directors went to great pains to quiet the political division, with one director stating that the club was “in no sense a political club, and it never will be. We are not even allowed to talk politics in the club-house. Our statutes forbid it.” Despite this pledge, on several occasions the Germania Club struggled to distance itself from political activities. In 1895 the club celebrated German statesman Otto von Bismarck’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and four years later the club commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German uprisings of 1848.

This attachment to the homeland caused some to question the patriotism of the German-American community, first in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. In response, the Germania Club raised money and volunteers for a regiment to assist in the war effort. Anti-German sentiments resurfaced during World War I with devastating effects on German-American culture. At the start of the war in 1914, well before America’s entry, German-Americans openly supported the German side; for example, the Germania Club raised money for the Red Cross in Germany. As the war unfolded, German-Americans suppressed their cultural identity in the face of rising anti-German sentiment. In 1918, the year of the United States’ entry into the war, the Germania Club board voted to rename itself the Lincoln Club. The club president asked, “What is a name unless we prove ourselves worthy of it by adhering to the high ideals and principles of the man whose name we adopt, and proving again and again true, loyal Americans?”

By 1934, membership in the Germania Club had dropped to only 63 people, with fewer than a dozen active members. With debts in excess of \$200,000, the club declared bankruptcy in 1935, but it reorganized and survived the Depression. To raise money, the club began renting out the building to outside organizations. In 1938, a group of 1,000 people gathered at the



During World War I, a German submarine sank the British liner *RMS Lusitania* killing 1,198 civilian passengers. The disaster turned public opinion against Germany and, by extension, German-Americans. The sinking of the *Lusitania* inspired the political cartoon at upper left. The caption, which read “Now it must be one or another,” challenged German-Americans to abandon their hyphenated identity. At upper right, a group of children stand in front of a sign posted in the Edison Park neighborhood in 1917 which read: “DANGER!! To Pro-Germans --- Loyal Americans Welcome to Edison Park.” It was in this climate that the Germania Club changed its name to the Lincoln Club in 1918.

CLUB FREE

DEBT LIQUIDATION CAMPAIGN

SPIRIT GERMANIA CLUB

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THE “SPIRIT OF GERMANIA” CALLS YOU

The combination of anti-German sentiments during both World Wars and the effects of the Great Depression had a devastating effect on the club. Fundraising (left) and membership drives eventually restored the club to stability by the late-1940s.



Germania Club to hear a speech by Gerhard Wilhelm Kunze, leader of the German-American Bund, a radical political organization modeled along the lines of the Nazi party in Germany. A violent clash at the event resulted in three arrests and negative press coverage for the club. The club leadership immediately denounced and banned the Bund, but the incident cast a cloud over the struggling organization.

The Germania Club did not emerge from its financial troubles and low membership until 1947, and the club remained stable until the 1960s when outward migration of German-Americans to the suburbs and fading identification with ethnicity presented new challenges. Redevelopment of the surrounding neighborhoods also posed a threat, and as early as 1955 one columnist noted that “with demolition crews moving in upon the Near North’s antique properties, the nineteenth century club will be even more unique.”

### *The Recent Past*

In 1964 the Urban Renewal Board proposed demolition of the Germania Club, along with the Red Star Inn, another German-American landmark across the street from the club, to make way for the Carl Sandburg Development. Edwin Eckert, the president of the Germania Club, responded to the board: “If we destroy our community landmarks, we will have a city without visible history, citizens without roots and leaders callous to our American heritage.” However, by the late-1960s rising maintenance costs, lack of parking, and the distance of the club from its now mostly suburban membership forced the club to consider the Urban Renewal Board’s offer to buy the property.

The demolition of the Red Star Inn in 1970 recommitted the Germania Club membership to preserve their building. Attempts to reinvigorate the club in the mid-1970s included efforts to gain local landmark designation. The Germania Club building was threatened again in 1985 by a proposal to build a 45-story residential high-rise on top of the club building that would “use parts of the existing old Germania building.”

In 1986, following years of declining membership, the men’s chapter of the club dissolved, and the building was sold to a commercial developer. The women’s chapter is still active, but it no longer meets in the building. The building’s ground floor is currently rented to several businesses. The large main rooms are still intact and are rented for special occasions.

Today, the Germania Club is one of the strongest links to the city’s German-American cultural history. Many other such landmarks, such as the Red Star Inn, the German Building from the World’s Columbian Exposition (demolished, 1925), and the German Opera House/Garrick Theater (demolished, 1961) were all identified with Germans in Chicago, but the Germania Club remains—a rare and distinguished touchstone to German heritage.

The Germania Club Building is included in the *AIA Guide to Chicago*, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, and was ranked “orange” in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey.



**A photograph from the mid-twentieth century looking west on Germania Place, with the Germania Club on the right and the Red Star Inn, a popular German restaurant, on the left.**



**A current view of Germania Place. In 1970 the Red Star Inn was demolished to widen Germania Place to provide better access to the Sandburg Village high-rise apartment development. The loss of the Red Star Inn galvanized the membership of the Germania Club to preserve their building.**



## CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Germania Club Building be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### ***Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City’s History***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historical, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The Germania Club Building conveys important aspects of Chicago’s social and cultural history, especially the contribution of social clubs and the importance of ethnic identity to the city’s history.
- The Germania Club Building illuminates important aspects of the history of the German-American community in Chicago, one of the city’s largest ethnic groups. Organized in 1865 as an ethnic choral society, the Germania Club was one of the longest-surviving clubs in the city, and it was a focal point for German-American social and cultural life for more than 120 years.
- Throughout its history, the club membership included numerous prominent Chicagoans, and the club was host to many dignitaries, including German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, scientist Albert Einstein, and composer Richard Strauss.
- The Germania Club Building is one of the strongest and rarest links to the city’s German-American culture. Many other buildings associated with this ethnic group have been demolished. The Germania Club, however, remains the most prominent of the non-religious properties associated with German-Americans in Chicago.

### ***Criterion 4: Important Architecture***

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or workmanship.*

- The Germania Club Building is one of the best and last remaining examples in Chicago of a once-popular building type: the neighborhood club. Clubs buildings were prominent in the social and architectural landscape of Chicago neighborhoods during the late-nineteenth century.
- The Germania Club Building combines the Romanesque Revival and German Neoclassical styles, an unusual combination of styles in Chicago and a particularly distinguished and accomplished work of architecture.
- The Germania Club Building possesses a high degree of craftsmanship and detailing in traditional materials, including stone, brick, and terra cotta.
- On the interior, the design of the Germania Club Building features grand historic spaces with fine Classical Revival-style details. These spaces remain particularly distinctive for their fine craftsmanship and for the retention of the majority of their original details.



Germania Club Flag.



Top left, left and above: Photos of the Germania Club Building taken by Bob Thall in 1996.

- The architecture of the Germania Club Building is a reflection of the prominence, accomplishments, and excellence in the fields of architecture and the building crafts of the German-American community in Chicago.

***Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature***

*Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.*

- With its rich architecture and massive appearance, the Germania Club Building is a distinctive and familiar visual feature on the Near North Side on a major street near the well-traveled intersection of North Avenue and Clark Street.
- The architectural quality of the Germania Club Building stands out in its context of high-rise buildings of Sandburg Village and other mid- to late-twentieth century architecture in the neighborhood.

***Integrity Criterion***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.*

The Germania Club Building possesses excellent integrity on its exterior facades and its major interior spaces and the vast majority of its original features and details. The retail storefronts on Clark Street are not original, and the storefront at the southeast corner of the building has been recessed. Despite these changes, the overall transparency and configuration of the storefronts is consistent with the historic appearance.

As noted in the report, the original pressed metal details at the pediments, frieze, cornice, and parapet were badly deteriorated and replaced in 1987. Though simplified in their detail, the new metal details are sympathetic to the original design. The original panelled wood main entrance doors on Germania Place (see opposite page) were replaced at some point in the recent past with a revolving door.

**SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Germania Club Building, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks recommends that the significant historical and architectural features be identified as:



- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building, and
- The major historic public interior spaces of the building, including:
  - The building entrance vestibule and first-floor foyer on West Germania Place, and
  - The grand stairway from the street-level entrance to the second-floor gallery level, and
  - The three connecting rooms and enclosed porch on the mezzanine (the level between the first and second floors), and
  - The second-floor foyer (including but not limited to the stained glass window in the hallway outside of the main ballroom), and
  - The ballroom, main dining room, and the connecting solarium on the second floor, and
  - The third-floor galleries opening onto the ballroom and the dining room.

For all identified interior spaces, the light fixtures are not historic and are excluded from the designation.



**The entrance to the Germania Club Building (the original front doors have since been replaced).**

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*The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*: p. 4, top.

*One Hundredth Anniversary of Germania Club*: p. 4, bottom right and bottom left; p. 8, top right; p. 10, top; p. 17 top left and middle right; p. 19, bottom; p. 23, top right; p. 25.

[www.germaniaplace.com](http://www.germaniaplace.com): p. 10, middle right, p. 17, lower left.

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