

From the Bach House research by Bill Kundert and Leila Edwards

Location/Neighborhood

The Bach House is located in the Birchwood Beach area of Rogers Park, a lakefront neighborhood on the far north side of Chicago. “Situated in the northern extent of the City of Chicago, the communities of West Ridge and Rogers Park were annexed by Chicago in 1893. Encompassing an area of just over five square miles between Lake Michigan and the North Branch of the Chicago River, the area presents both the urban and the suburban. Rogers Park, with 34,000 people per square mile, presents an urban face, with apartments and condominiums predominating, while neighboring West Ridge, with a mere 20,700 people per square mile, is a neighborhood of single-family homes and townhouses.

“Having grown first as suburbs of Chicago, each community has its own character and history. Rogers Park developed primarily as a bedroom community for Chicago, having little industry on its own. In contrast, the West Ridge community developed around farmers who realized that raising flowers was far more profitable than raising vegetables and traded in their plows for greenhouses. The area has a rich history that includes Loyola University, which grew with Rogers Park from the late 1800s into the 21st century.”¹

Famous residents of the area have included: former First Lady Betty Ford; Shani Davis, Olympic speed skater; Hugh Downs, TV journalist; comedian Tina Fey; and actor/writer/director Harold Ramis.

Birchwood Beach, the immediate area where the Bach House is located, had no paved streets and was a sandbank filled with birch and oak trees as late as the 1870s. Samuel B. Chase, a developer of Rogers Park, named the area after his farm in the Lake View section of Chicago. When Sheridan Road was laid out, people began seeing it as a lakefront route between Chicago and towns further north, and movement began to develop the area. By 1892 Rogers Park was being aggressively developed, and builders were continuing to subdivide their properties for houses and streets. The growth continued, and during the Rogers Park building boom in the 1920s, Birchwood Beach (like the neighboring Howard District) exploded with new apartment buildings and homes. As a result, many houses, such as the Bach House lost their original lake views. The neighborhood became a combination of two- and three-story apartment buildings, apartment hotels, small shopping areas, and modern houses.²

Two other Wright homes, both now demolished, were located in Birchwood Beach: the Samuel Horner House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1908) and the Oscar M. and Katherine B. Steffens House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1909), which was owned for a time by Emil Bach’s brother Otto.

The building immediately north of the Bach House, at 7421 North Sheridan Road, is now the Lang House Bed and Breakfast. It was originally built as a private home in 1919 and was designed by architect Edgar M. Newman in the American Four Square style with distinct Prairie style elements. The home was recently restored, and most of its original touches – art nouveau wall paintings, mosaic rooms, and stained glass windows – remain.

¹ Chicago Architecture Foundation, *Openhouse Chicago*, June [2011] Newsletter

² Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, *An Early History of Birchwood Beach*, last updated July 30, 2009