

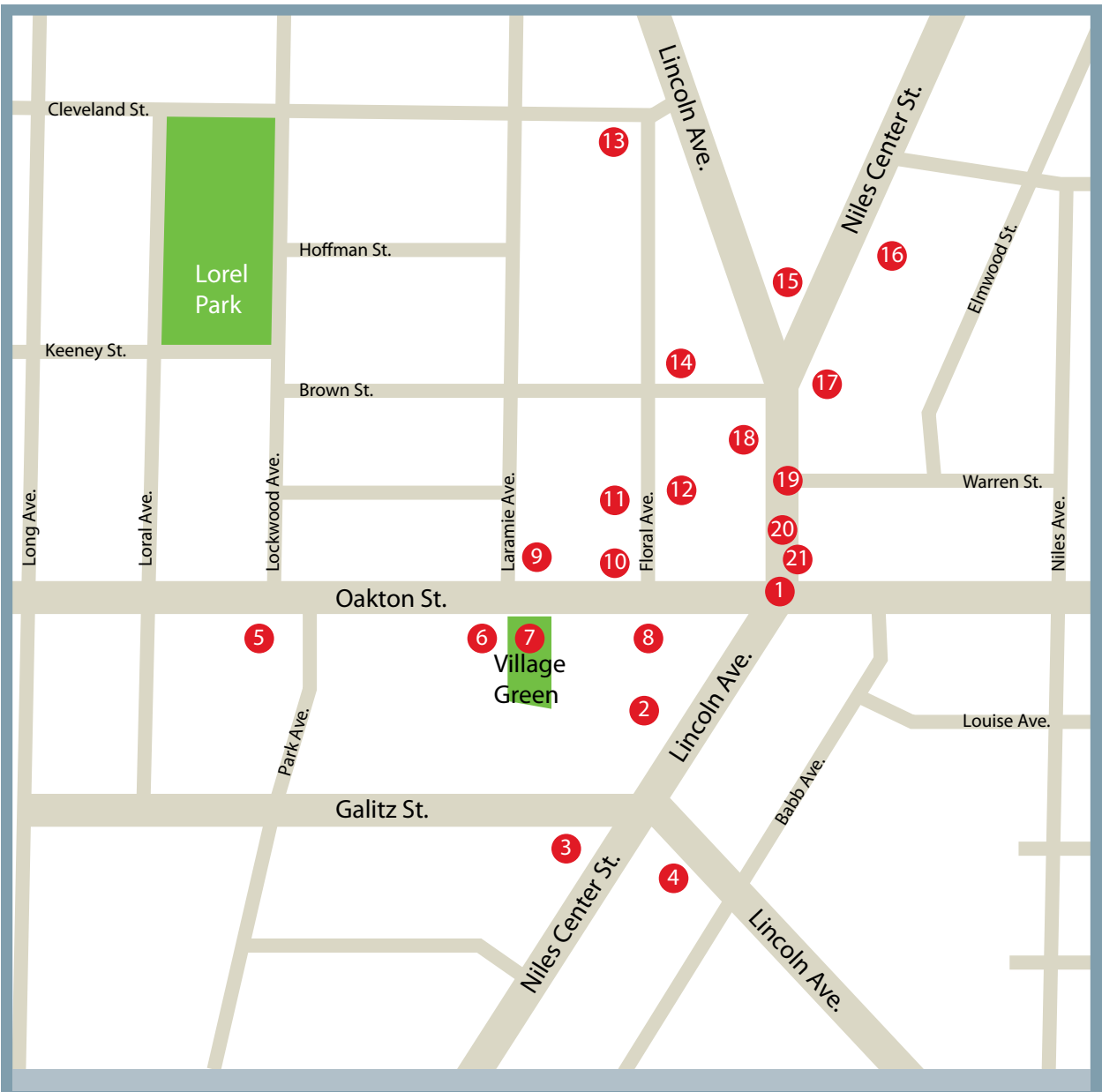
# Historic Skokie Walking Tour

courtesy of The Skokie Heritage Museum



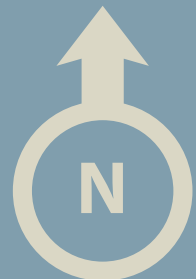
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# Historic Skokie Walking Tour

courtesy of The Skokie Heritage Museum



**1** **Lincoln Ave. and Oakton St.** When Skokie (originally named Niles Centre) was incorporated in 1888, it was about one square mile in area and lay in the middle of Niles Township. Standing at the corner of Lincoln Ave., originally called Main St., and Oakton St., originally Harms Rd., one can see three of Niles Centre's original boundaries: Skokie Blvd. to the east, Long Ave. to the west, and Mulford Ave. to the south. Today's Main St. was the northern boundary except for a small area to the northwest that included two cemeteries and farms.



*Looking north on Lincoln Ave. from Oakton St.*

Early Skokie looked quite different from how it does now. Prior to 1834, the Potawatomi Native American group lived in the area. The area was heavily wooded, full of game and swamps. There were a few Native American trails through the area, most notably Lincoln Ave. and Niles Center Rd., formerly Ridge Rd., which followed the high ground next to the swampy lowlands and led to Wilmette. Lumbering became an important trade because of the demand for housing and fuel spurred on by pioneer settlers moving into the area. One of the earliest roads connected Lincoln Ave. to Miller's Mill, a sawmill located at the Chicago River just south of present day Dempster St. in Morton Grove.

The first home built in 1839 belonged to Mr. O'Brien and was located near 4920 Oakton St. However, he did not stay long. Then German immigrants started to settle in the Niles Centre area. One such immigrant was Henry Harms, who came to the area in 1854 and was considered to be the village's founding father. His first house was located south of the intersection of Lincoln Ave. and Oakton St. His second home and general store, built in 1860, were at the southwest corner of Oakton St. and Lincoln Ave. (His third and final house was located at 5319 Oakton St.) Within the store were the first Post Office, a saloon and a dance hall. Harms owned most of the land to the southwest of Lincoln Ave. and Oakton St. He opened a plank toll road to Chicago along what is now Lincoln Ave. and supervised the drainage of the surrounding land to make farming possible.

At the southeast corner of Lincoln Ave. and Oakton St., Harms built the first store in Niles Center in 1858, as well as the Niles Centre Hotel, which was operated by future village trustee Fritz Rose. A picnic grove filled with trees existed behind the hotel. The hotel burned down in 1911.

On the northwest corner, another general store and saloon were built by Peter Bergmann and later bought by Peter Blameuser in 1867. The large three-story building was a landmark until it was moved west in 1926 and razed in 1971.



*Niles Center Hotel, early 1900s*



*Niles Center Theater, early 1900s*

**2** **The Theater: 7924 Lincoln Ave.** South on Lincoln Ave. is the Niles Centre Theater, built in 1915 with the arrival of electricity. Samuel Meyer, son of pioneer Nicholas Meyer, built the theater. In 1942, the theater was remodeled. The front steps and balcony were removed, the theater was enlarged and a new façade was added to the front of the building.



*St. Paul's Lutheran Church, c.1900*

**3** **St. Paul's Lutheran Church: Niles Center Rd. and Galitz St.** South of the Skokie Theater, one will find St. Paul's Lutheran Church. A group of dissident congregants from St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church founded St. Paul's in 1880. On half an acre of land donated by Henry Rohr, the first church, a wooden structure was built in 1881.

The present brick church replaced the wooden church in 1910. Red bricks were used to add a decorative contrast. Inside, one can see vivid stained glass windows with German inscriptions bearing the names of some of Niles Centre's pioneer families. (Services were conducted in German at this church until the 1950s). There is also an oak altar framing a life-sized figure of Christ and a pipe organ with 1,569 pipes dedicated in 1975. The church school opened in 1881 but closed during the depression and did not re-open until 1954, when the present school was built. The congregation also maintains a cemetery on the east side of Harms Rd., north of Lincoln Ave.

**4** **Schoening's Blacksmith Shop, 7880 Lincoln Ave.** Common businesses in early Niles Centre included taverns and blacksmith shops. This building was Fred Schoening's second blacksmith shop, the first was at 7902 Lincoln Ave., at the corner of Lincoln Ave. and Galitz St. Schoening worked on many residents' wagons and buggies including that of Dr. A. Louise Klehm. Although the façade is quite different, the building still stands and a remnant of the building's original purpose is still visible today - a horse shoe is imbedded in the sidewalk.

**5** **The Harrer House: 5309 Oakton St.** Built of brick in 1908 by Adam Harrer, the first mayor of Niles Centre, as well as the first Fire Chief, this house contained two fireplaces, two parlors, four bedrooms and four bathrooms. The garden apartment below was once used as a shop, as well. Over the years, the home has been refurbished several times. It is currently restored to an appearance similar to that of its original construction.



*The home of Adam Harrer*



*Skokie Public Library, c. 1960*

**6** **Skokie Public Library: 5215 Oakton St.** The library began on February 8, 1930 as a project of the Cosmos Club, later the Civic Women's Club of Skokie. Staffed with volunteers, the library was located in a rented space at 5102 Oakton St. Because of a lack of funds, the library closed in 1932. After receiving a book donation in 1933, the library reopened in the Village Hall. It remained in the Village Hall until 1942, when it became a tax-supported institution and moved into a shared space with the Post Office at 4913 Oakton St. After the Post Office moved in 1952, the library took over the entire space.

In 1960, the library moved to its current location. Designed by James Hammond and Walter Netsch, of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, the building is an example of modern architecture, with its simple lines and forms. The interior also reflected this modernity through its furnishings - famed modern architect Mies Van der Rohe provided its chairs. Also, the library was built around a courtyard and reflecting pool, at the center of which is the metal sculpture, Swans, created by Elliot Balter in 1978.

There have been additions to the library in recent years. The second floor addition was constructed in July 1972 and was also designed by James Hammond. The third floor was added in 2003. Besides enlarging the library, its interiors were also redesigned. The second floor is 292 feet long - 8 feet shy of a football field.

**7** **The Village Green** Just east of the Skokie Public Library is the Village Hall. Traveling toward the Village Hall, one will cross the Village Green, an open space acquired through an agreement with the federal government in 1964. Within this green is a sculpture by modern artist John David Mooney, commissioned by the village and installed in 1978. About ten years later, the Holocaust Memorial was also placed within this area, and the peace pole was added in 2001.



*Mooney Sculpture, c. 1978*

**8** **Village Hall: 5127 Oakton St.** The Village Hall was built in 1927 during a land boom. It was designed to reflect Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Elements of the façade include color tile accents, a gold cupola, four massive wooden columns, plasters, and window arches. The building was remodeled in the 1950s and the southern section and garden entry were added in the 1980s.

Until a separate police station opened in 1957, the village police department and jail were located in the hall; the east side windows were barred suggesting these were the jail cells.

The Village Hall was built by descendants of some of Niles Centre's founding families, including: F.A. Gabel, who made the sheet metal; A. Kutz, who did the plumbing and heating; and the Niles Center Coal and Building Materials Company, owned by William Springer and Clara Blameuser, which provided gravel and cement.

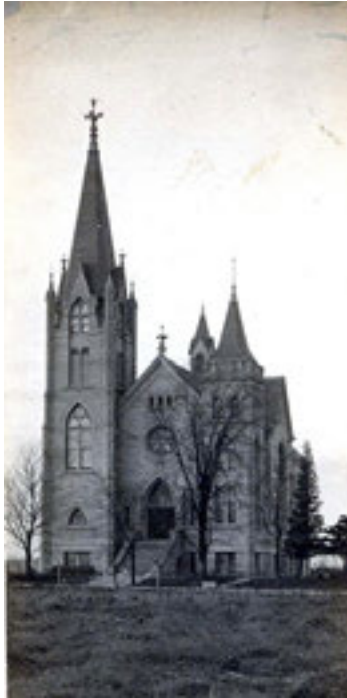
Names of other important figures and information about the Village Hall can be seen on bronze tablets near the front doors.



*Village Hall, 1985*

**9 St. Peter's United Church of Christ: Oakton St. and Laramie Ave.** The church stands on land donated in the mid-19th century by Peter Blameuser. Mr. Blameuser, a Roman Catholic, stipulated that the church be named for his patron saint, St. Peter. The deed also stated that no part of the land could be used for a cemetery, so the congregation's cemetery is located on the west side of Harms Rd., north of Lincoln Ave. Many of Niles Centre's early settlers are buried there.

The original brick building, constructed on this site in 1868, was a 32 feet by 50 feet structure with a small bell tower. The minister's quarters and Sunday school were on the ground floor, the sanctuary was on the upper level, and there was no basement. A larger bell tower and bell,



*St. Peter's United Church of Christ, c. 1900s*

which were added in 1887, were struck by lightning in 1901. This damaged the original church to the point that it needed to be rebuilt, which occurred in 1903. It was rebuilt with a design similar to the original, and certain items were re-used, such as bricks, doorknobs and other hardware. This church was home to many



*St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, late 1860s*

German settlers, which is why all church services were in German until 1908. St. Peter's bell tower served the community as the town fire alarm for many years. The church still has the 1877 bell, which was cast in St. Louis, MO.

The church also contains many stained glass windows, which were installed in 1920. Several of the windows were created in Munich, Germany. However, the large east window is believed to be of Tiffany glass. It is dedicated to the memory of Nicholas and Elizabeth Meyer, who first settled in Niles Centre in the 1840s.

The church previously called St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church changed its name to St. Peter's United Church of Christ to reflect the merging of denominations in 1958.



**10** Northwest corner of Floral Ave. and Oakton St. Floral Ave., originally Back St., was one of the first residential streets. Many large older homes can be seen on Floral Ave. One home no longer present was at the northwest corner of Floral Ave. and Oakton St. The home belonged to Edwin T. Klehm, and was the first home to have indoor plumbing (powered by a windmill) and the first to have electricity.



*Home of Charles Kindt*



*Home of Edwin T. Klehm*

**11** **The Kindt House: 8024 Floral Ave.** This house across from the Skokie Heritage Museum was built in 1877. It belonged to Charles Kindt, one of early Niles Centre's mailmen. Its original shingles and ironwork have been covered and removed, and a larger porch has been put in. However, some older elements are still visible such as the stone base of the house.



*Looking north up Floral Ave. from Oakton St., c. 1900s*



*Engine House, c. 1915*

## 12 **Historic Engine House and Log Cabin: 8031 Floral Ave.**

The Engine House was built in 1887 and manned by the Niles Centre Volunteer Fire Co., which was founded in 1881. The keystone commemorating the erection of the building can still be seen on the front of it. The first officers were George C. Klehm, Henry Kolf, Fred Stielow, and Adam Harrer.

The first floor was used to store the firefighting equipment and served as a jail, with two cells, while the upstairs served as a meeting place. Village meetings were held there until the Village Hall was built in 1927. Niles Centre's vote to become a village even happened there. Boxing matches were held upstairs, as were dances. The band would sit up in the balcony. For a short time the upstairs also served as a school, with pioneer George C. Klehm's daughter, Alma Klehm as teacher. She would be a prominent figure in the teaching community for many years to come.

The Skokie Fire Department used the Historic Engine House until 1969, and in the 1970s, the Health Department used it, until an addition to the Village Hall opened. When the Health Department relocated to Village Hall, it became the home of the Skokie Historical Society. Then, in 1991, the Skokie Park District renovated the Engine House to its 1910s appearance and opened the Skokie Heritage Museum in 1992.

Many of the historic elements of the Engine House were restored during the 1991 renovation, including: the bell tower, the front doors, the brickwork and the woodwork.



*The Meyer Family Log Cabin*

The cabin first stood at 5406 Lincoln Ave. It had been covered in siding and used as a chicken coup and shed. After it was realized what was underneath, the cabin was deeded to the Village of Skokie in 1974 and moved to its current location in 1982. The logs, coming from five different types of trees, including Oak and Walnut, along the Des Plaines River and weighing as much as 1000 pounds, were carefully placed back together like a jigsaw puzzle. The reconstruction was done with tools and materials that would have been used when originally constructed including square nails and daubing, which is a mixture of clay, straw, lake sand, water and horsehair used to fill in gaps between the logs. Outside the cabin, one can also see various plants and prairie grasses that were present in the 1840s.



*Stielow and Lies Greenhouses, early 1900s*

**13** Southwest corner of Floral Ave and Cleveland St. The end of this block was home to two greenhouses. Greenhouses were an important part of life in early Niles Centre. The area became known for its vegetable and flower production, holding its own Market Days, as well as supplying items to Chicago. Over time the greenhouses were eliminated because of the pollution caused by smoke from their chimneys and due to suburban development.

At this location, one greenhouse belonged to the Stielow family, and the other to Al Lies.

In 1925, Lies replaced his greenhouse at 8146 Floral Ave. with the Niles Center Recreation Rooms. The building contained a 10-lane bowling alley, pool tables and a bar. North of the building was a miniature golf course also operated by Lies. The building was razed in 2008. The Niles Center Home Laundry, just south of the Recreation Rooms and also built in 1925, was razed in 2011. The Stielow family's brick home at nearby 8114 Floral Ave. is still present.

**14** Remke's Shoe Store: 5110-5114 Brown St. Backtracking to the intersection of Brown St. and Floral Ave., and going east on Brown St., one will come across, what use to be Remke's Shoe Store. The building was originally located at the corner of Lincoln Ave. and Brown St., but then moved to its present location in the 1920s. The large store, made of a wood frame, was probably erected before 1900. Its age can be noted by observing its chimneys and wooden structure.



*Girls eating ice cream in front of the Niles Center Recreation Rooms and Niles Center Home Laundry, c. 1920s*

# 15 **St. Peter Catholic Church: At the fork of Lincoln Ave. and Niles Center Rd.**

St. Peter Catholic Parish was established in 1868. The first church for the parish was a frame structure built in 1869 by Reverend Joseph Beinke and 65 families from the Niles Centre area. Building was lead by parishioner, P. Kirscht, and the total building cost was \$3,536. The land for the church was donated by Peter and Magdalena (Heinz) Blameuser. In recognition of this gift, the church was named after St. Peter. It was located just north of the church's present location, and faced Lincoln Ave. A wood frame school was built in 1873 at the fork of Lincoln Ave. and Niles Center Rd. When the present church was built, the school was rebuilt further north.



*St. Peter Catholic Church, late 1890s*



*St. Peter School, late 1890s*

The Chicago Architect Henry Schlacks built the present church, which stands at the apex of the angle formed by Lincoln Ave. and Niles Center Rd., in 1894 at a cost of \$33,000. The church built in Gothic Revival Style incorporates pointed arches and tall columns in both its interior and exterior. Eight gigantic trees serve as supports for the high vaulted roof, however from the inside they appear as pillars on each side of the church. Brick from Milwaukee was used to build the structure.

Looking inside the church, past the nave, one will find the sanctuary where the main altar is located. The altar and background shrines are made of butternut wood, while the statutes are made of pearwood. Stained glass windows, made in Germany, portray Peter receiving the Keys to the Kingdom and the Four Evangelists. Early parishioners donated the windows on each side of the nave. The church bell tower contains three bronze bells. Two of which were purchased by Reverend Arthur Sauer, during whose long tenure the original Gothic style of the church was renovated and restored. Looking outside, one can also see the cornerstone commemorating the church's original completion--- A.D. May 20, 1894.

**16** **St. Peter Catholic Church Cemetery** Just east of St. Peter Catholic Church, one will find St. Peter Catholic Church cemetery. Chartered the same year as the church, 1869, the cemetery is filled with many of Niles Centre's early settlers. The cemetery land was donated by Peter Blameuser and his brother Eberhard. Some of the graves of Niles Centre pioneers that can be seen from the street are: Paroubek, Blameuser, Muno, and Gabel. Many tombstone inscriptions are written in German since many of the early settlers immigrated from Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and other middle European countries.

At the center of the cemetery is the priests' plot where former pastors are buried, while in the northeast corner of the cemetery lies the "Profane Corner," an area set aside for the burial of suicides.



*Interior of Schoeneberger Brothers General Store, c. 1910*

**17** **Harrer's Butcher Shop: 8051 Lincoln Ave.** Going south on Lincoln Ave., one will come across this building. In 1874, Michael Harrer, uncle of Niles Centre's first mayor, Adam Harrer, started his butcher shop here. He came to the area from Kaltenbrunn, Bavaria in 1845. He first tried farming, mining out west, and then began the butcher shop. The building, for years owned by the Haben family, who run the local funeral home, contained living spaces upstairs and the store below. In the 1980s, the building was renovated and turned into a single-family home by descendants of the Haben family. It was also recognized on the National Registry of Historic Places in the 1980s, becoming one of only two buildings in Skokie to boast this honor. The age of this building can be seen in the keystone at the top of the building, which is engraved with the date 1874.

**18** **Schoeneberger Brothers General Store: 8042 Lincoln Ave.** On the west side of Lincoln Ave., this stone and brick building was built around 1910 and replaced the Schoenebergers' earlier store, which was made of wood. The 8044 Lincoln Ave. section of the building was added on later. Paroubek's bakery, founded in 1915, moved to 8044 Lincoln Ave., renaming itself as Paroubek's Community Bakery. It has since been home to two other bakeries – Vitello's Bakery and currently Sweetie Pie's Bakery.

# 19 **Market Days (1880-1920): Lincoln Ave. at Warren Ave.**

Beginning in 1880, Niles Centre held an open market twice a month. Started by Peter Blameuser, Sr. and Peter Honvlez, the market stretched from the fork at St. Peter Catholic Church to Oakton St. and overflowed onto Warren Ave., then called Market St. Livestock and other items were bought and traded. Farmers and merchants from Chicago and as far as Kane and McHenry Counties came to town. Filled with farmers, merchants, various entertainers and performers, horse races and packed saloons, Niles Centre was a lively place during market days.

# 20 **Big Fire of 1910: Lincoln Ave. north of Oakton St.**

On a dry, windy day in early September during one of the Village's market days, fire broke out and destroyed much of the Village's business district. Believed to have started in a barn used to make wine behind Jacob Melzer's saloon at 8020 Lincoln Ave., the fire spread as far as 8014 Lincoln Ave.

Because of the weather, the fire was difficult to fight with just the Village's volunteer fire company so Evanston, Morton Grove and even Chicago assisted the Village. Water from Blameuser's pond at the northeast corner of Niles Ave. and Oakton St. helped put out the fire. This pond also served as an ice rink in winter.

The destruction of property was not the only ill effect of the fire. In order to save their possessions many property owners placed their items outside on the street. Since, the fire occurred on market day and hundreds of strangers were in town, looting began. An emergency police force was deputized, which made 8 arrests. However, the fire did have its benefits for the need of a centralized water supply was recognized and the wooden structures destroyed



*Market Day in Niles Center, looking north on Lincoln Ave. from Oakton St.*



*Blameuser residence and pond, c. 1900.*



*Siegel's Cigar Store, c. 1900s.*

by the fire were replaced by fire resistant brick buildings. One business whose original wooden structure was replaced with a brick building was Siegel's Cigar Store and Barber Shop. This structure is located south of the current parking lot on the west side of Lincoln Ave.

# 21 **First National Bank of Skokie: 8001 Lincoln Ave.**

On the northeast corner of Oakton St. and Lincoln Ave. was the First National Bank of Skokie, now Chase Bank. The current concrete and Algonquin stone structure, built in 1973, replaced the old bank building. The current building was created by Graham-Anderson-Probst-White and cost 4.5 million dollars. Like the Skokie Public Library, the interior and exterior reflect modern architecture.

The original bank building, built in 1912, was similar to the Village Hall with its Neo-classical character. Home of the Niles Center State Bank, it was built of red brick, supported with two large white columns, and its windows were decorated with ornamental ironwork.

William Galitz, Peter Hoffman, Charles Castle, A. B. Williams, George C. Klehm and John W. Brown founded the Niles Center State Bank in 1907. It was first located in rented space in the Blameuser Building at 8000 Lincoln Ave. For several years, Galitz was the only employee. However, he would later become president. In 1946, the bank was chartered as the First National Bank of Skokie. Willard C. Galitz, the son of William, served the bank as president and board member for many years thereafter.



*Niles Center State Bank, c. 1912*



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