

The history of Oak Lawn stretches back to 1842 when a land broker, Julian Hatch, acquired 1,273 acres in the area. From this land, a settlement named Black Oaks Grove, or simply Black Oaks, was established. The moniker was given due to the abundance of Black Oaks that lined modern-day 95th Street. The initial settler of Black Oaks was a farmer named John Simpson who obtained a parcel of land along today's 95th Street, ultimately establishing his farm in 1858. By 1860, the modest community instituted its first school, which was located at the corner of 95th Street and 55th Avenue. Soon after, with the influx of migrants from the south after the Civil War, the Trinity Lutheran Church was founded.

After area residents John and Charles Simpson, John Simpson, Jr. and Franklin Chamberlain signed an agreement with railroad builder Colonel Ralph Plumb in 1879, Black Oaks Grove experienced its initial surge of growth. This agreement led to the re-routing of the railroad through Black Oaks Grove, which led to the establishment of a freight and passenger station, along with a telegraph office. By 1881, the Wabash Railroad's tracks had been laid and the line was primed for service.

Since another railroad station donned the name Black Oaks Grove, the settlement changed its name to Oak Lawn. The community began to flourish with the construction of new subdivisions, the organization of two more churches and the institution of a larger school near the train station in the early 1900s. During this time, many of Oak Lawn's surrounding communities began annexing land to the growing city of Chicago; but the town held its own and incorporated as a Village on April 20, 1909 with a population of 287.

Growth and development ensued after incorporation, with the advent of electricity in 1911 and the first fire department in the 1920s. By this time, Oak Lawn was home to more than 2,000 residents, a number that only moderately increased to 3,500 in 1940 due to the Great Depression. A library was built in 1936, followed by the Covington School in 1937 and the organization of the Park District in 1944.

The population exceeded 13,300 in 1953 and the community continued to enhance its quality of life through the construction of a Village office, a new library and a second fire station. The City-Manager form of government was adopted during the early 1950s as well.

The decade of the 1960s brought about rapid growth in Oak Lawn, with the population tripling to 27,000 residents. At the same time, additional land was annexed to the Village, enlarging its boundaries west to Harlem Avenue. More and more families established homes here and modernization progressed. Oak Lawn became a home-rule community in 1971.

Today, Oak Lawn stands as a mature community of more than 56,000 residents. Affordable homes in friendly neighborhoods and quality community services are complemented by an assortment of business establishments and retailers. Thanks to its location just outside of Chicago and near major expressways and rail lines, Oak Lawn continues to be an attractive site for new businesses and prospective employees.

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