

SABR 45 Downtown Baseball Walking Tour descriptions

#1. START: Palmer House Hilton

17 East Monroe St.

Directions to #2: Exit onto State Street on the west side of the hotel. Turn left out the door and walk south for two blocks to Jackson Drive. Turn right on Jackson Drive and walk two blocks (west) to Dearborn Street. Turn left on Dearborn Street and walk one block south to the Fisher Building.

#2. Fisher Building

343 South Dearborn St.

Although the official birthplace of the American League was in Milwaukee, the Fisher Building is where Ban Johnson and Charles Comiskey brought their idea to fruition and waged a successful war against the National League at the turn of the 20th century. Starting in 1900, Johnson kept his office on the 12th floor here and ran the American League with an iron fist for more than a quarter-century, leading organized baseball (for better or worse) through the Federal League challenge, World War I, and the Black Sox Scandal, as de facto head of the National Commission.

Directions to #3: The Fisher Building is on the northeast corner of Dearborn and Van Buren streets. The Old Colony Building is on the southeast corner, a half-block south.

#3. Old Colony Building

407 South Dearborn St.

In 1913, Chicago businessman James Gilmore established the Federal League headquarters in the Old Colony Building — just down the street from Ban Johnson's office as American League president — and gave organized baseball's two-league system its greatest legal threat. The Federal League signed up dozens of veteran major-league players, including Joe Tinker, Claude Hendrix, and Russ Ford, but financial difficulties forced the circuit to fold after just two seasons (1914-15). The league filed an antitrust lawsuit against organized baseball, but federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis (later to become baseball's commissioner) delayed making a decision until the league ran out of money.

Directions to #4: Continue south on Dearborn Street for one block to Congress Parkway. Turn left (east) on Congress and walk three blocks, past the Harold Washington Public Library, to Michigan Avenue. The Congress Plaza Hotel is on the southwest corner of Congress Parkway and Michigan Avenue. Cross the street to the Grant Park side for a better view of the Congress Plaza Hotel and the Chicago skyline as you continue the tour.

#4. Congress Plaza Hotel

520 South Michigan Ave.

The historic “Home of Presidents,” which opened in 1893 during the World's Columbian Exposition, was the site of some of baseball's most significant off-field events. Many key meetings during the Federal League war of 1914-15 were held here. During the 1919 World Series, gamblers stored \$40,000 in bribe money in the hotel safe before delivering some of it to White Sox players for fixing the fall classic. The following year, major-league owners met here and elected to hire Kenesaw Mountain Landis as the game's first commissioner. In 1947, Larry Doby signed his Cleveland Indians contract here to break the color barrier in the American League before making his debut at Comiskey Park. Jackie Robinson announced his retirement from the Brooklyn Dodgers with a letter to owner Walter O'Malley written here in 1956.

Directions to #5: Continue north on Michigan Avenue, past the Buckingham Fountain, for three blocks. 122 South Michigan is just north of Adams Street, across from the Art Institute.

#5. People's Gas Building
122 South Michigan Ave.

In the wake of the Black Sox Scandal, federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis was hired as baseball's first commissioner in November 1920. He set up his office in the People's Gas Building. It was here where he issued his famous “Regardless of the verdict of juries” edict in 1921 banning Shoeless Joe Jackson and the other “Eight Men Out” after they were acquitted of fixing the 1919 World Series. The following year, he suspended Babe Ruth for six weeks for disobeying a major-league rule by participating in a barnstorming tour after the World Series. In the winter of 1926-27, Landis held a series of high-profile hearings in this building investigating accusations that games between the White Sox and Detroit Tigers had been fixed in 1917.

Directions to #6: Continue north one block on Michigan Avenue to the Chicago Athletic Association building.

#6. Chicago Athletic Association
12 South Michigan Ave.

Founded in 1890 by elite Chicagoans such as Marshall Field, Cyrus McCormick, and A.G. Spalding, the Chicago Athletic Association was a nonprofit organization that provided a setting for athletic, business, and social activities. In 1915, when member William Wrigley bought the Chicago Cubs, the team adopted the club’s logo, permanently securing its place in Chicago history. The Chicago Athletic Association building was constructed in 1893, opening just in time for the end of the World's Columbian Exposition, and designed by noted architect Henry Ives Cobb. After the athletic club closed in 2007, the building was purchased by developers and reopened as a boutique hotel in May 2015 with a \$100 million renovation.

Directions to #7: Continue north on Michigan Avenue for two blocks to the corner of Randolph Street.

#7. White Stocking Park/Lakefront Park
(appx.) 145 North Michigan Ave.

Description: The National Association's Chicago White Stockings began playing at this site in 1871, but their first ballpark here was destroyed by the Great Fire in October. In 1878, the White Stockings — now part of the newly organized National League — returned to the original site and built a new ballpark called Lakefront Park. The outfield dimensions here were inviting (196 feet to right field), which helped Ned Williamson lead the NL with 27 home runs in 1884, a mark that stood as the single-season major-league record until Babe Ruth launched 29 homers in 1919. Today, this site is part of Millennium Park.

Directions to #8: Continue north on Michigan Avenue for three blocks to 333 North Michigan Ave.

#8. Judge Landis' second office, 1929-44
333 North Michigan Ave.

Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis spent the second half of his tenure in this Art Deco skyscraper built in 1928. During this time, he oversaw the establishment of night baseball and the annual All-Star Game (first played in 1933 at Comiskey Park), broke up the St. Louis Cardinals' “chain gang” farm system, and worked with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help keep baseball going during World War II. The building, which was designated as a Chicago Landmark in 1997, is now home to the NHL's Chicago Blackhawks flagship store and other high-end tenants.

Directions to #9: Continue north on Michigan Avenue over the Chicago River bridge. The Jack Brickhouse statue is on the right (east) side of the street, in the plaza just south of the Tribune Tower.

#9. Jack Brickhouse statue
(appx.) 419 North Michigan Ave.

Jack Brickhouse was Chicago's first great baseball broadcaster in the television era. He got his start calling White Sox games for WGN radio in the early 1940s, then moved to the station's Channel 9 on TV in 1948. He spent 34 seasons in the booth, delighting generations of Cubs and White Sox fans with his signature “Hey, Hey!” home-run call, before giving way to Harry Caray as the Cubs' No. 1 announcer. He was the recipient of the Baseball Hall of Fame's Ford Frick Award in 1983.

Directions to #10: Continue north about 50 feet to the Tribune Tower and cross the street to the southbound side of Michigan Avenue. Go down the stairwell (in front of the Walgreens) to the lower level of Michigan Avenue and continue to the Billy Goat.

#10. Billy Goat Tavern
430 North Michigan Ave. (lower level)

The legend of the “Billy Goat Curse” originated at this iconic saloon during the 1945 World Series. Hoping to bring his beloved Chicago Cubs good luck in Game Four, tavern owner William “Billy Goat” Sianis brought his pet goat, Murphy, to Wrigley Field. The goat was denied entrance by the ushers and Sianis angrily responded, “The Cubs ain't gonna win no more.” The Cubs lost the game and the World Series — and they haven't been back since. The Billy Goat Tavern moved from its original West Side location to Michigan Avenue in 1964 and was a favorite haunt of writers like Mike Royko (who popularized the Curse of the Billy Goat in his syndicated columns) at the nearby Tribune and Sun-Times newspaper offices.

Directions to #11: Turn right out the entrance of the Billy Goat and continue on West Hubbard Street for five blocks (0.3 miles) to Courthouse Place, just past the Dearborn Street intersection.

#11. Courthouse Place
54 West Hubbard St.

The old Cook County Criminal Court Building was the site of many famous legal proceedings, including the Black Sox Scandal grand jury hearings and criminal trial in 1920-21. It was here where a boy was said to have pleaded with Shoeless Joe Jackson, “Say it ain't so, Joe!” (although that story is likely apocryphal.) This building also hosted the Leopold and Loeb “crime of the century” murder trial in 1924 and was the setting for the hit play *The Front Page*. The criminal courts vacated the building in 1929 and, after years of neglect, it was restored in the 1980s as a private office complex.

Directions to #12: Walk south on Dearborn Street for one block to Kinzie Street. Harry Caray's is on the southeast corner.

#12. Harry Caray's Steakhouse
33 West Kinzie St.

Stop in and have a cold one for the “Cub Fan — Bud Man” who was one of baseball's most colorful broadcasters. Caray began his long career in St. Louis before settling in the Windy City and calling games for both the White Sox (1971-81) and the Cubs (1982-98) for a quarter-century. On the South Side, he began singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during the seventh-inning stretch and continued the tradition after moving to Wrigley Field. The century-old building that houses his restaurant, which opened in 1987, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

Walking directions to the hotel: Walk one block east to State Street and turn right. Walk south across the Chicago River bridge and continue about 10 blocks (0.8 miles) to the Palmer House Hilton entrance on State Street (just past Monroe.)

*Train directions to the hotel: If you wish to take the “L” back to the Palmer House Hilton from here, turn left on State Street and walk three blocks (north) to Grand Avenue. The Grand Avenue station entrance is on the northwest corner of Grand Avenue and State Street. Take the CTA Red Line train south to the **Monroe station** to get to the hotel. (Fare: \$3.)*