

Pullman Car Manufacturing Company

In early 1880, George Pullman purchased nearly 4,000 acres just west of Lake Calumet surrounding the Illinois Central Railroad to build his planned model industrial town to expand upon his rail sleeping car manufacturing capabilities. In an effort to attract the best class of mechanics seeking employment opportunities, Mr. Pullman decided to build a community and homes of such character and surroundings that skilled laborers would seek out the area. With the onset of the industrial era, Pullman observed that many workers lived in slums with unsanitary conditions and many “social ills.” Determined to provide his workers an improved standard of living, Pullman built his factory along with a town where they could “work, live, and worship.” A variety of shops and services, schools, and a church, along with beautifully landscaped streets, city parks, and a lake put Pullman’s accommodations well above the standards of the day. Visitors marveled at the town – renowned for its architecture and urban planning – a showplace during the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair.



This utopian setting, however, came at a price. Workers did not just live there for free, but rather they paid high rents and utility costs. When financial panic hit the country in 1893, Pullman’s profits dropped and he reduced workers’ salaries by about 25 percent without reducing the cost of rent. Left destitute, many frustrated employees walked off the job in May of that year sparking the Pullman Strike of 1894. Being one of the first national industrial unions, the strike expanded into a nationwide boycott affecting any train that moved a Pullman car. When President Grover Cleveland sent in troops under a federal court order to disrupt the strike and get trains moving, violence and rioting erupted in the streets marking the beginning of the modern day labor movement.

Today the history of Pullman is preserved by public agencies and private organizations who will partner with the National Park Service in preserving these resources and the history behind them. Pullman became a State Landmark in 1969, a National Landmark District in 1971, a City of Chicago Landmark in 1972, and was declared a National Historical Park in 2015 by President Obama. Today hundreds of Pullman houses continue to undergo privately funded interior and exterior renovation and restoration.

Since October of 2013, Illinois EPA has collaborated with the United States National Park Service (NPS) and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) to ensure that the Site is fully and safely available for future public use and enjoyment. The NPS owns the Administrative Building (0.24 acres), with the remainder of the site owned by the IHPA. Illinois EPA's Office of Site Evaluation (OSE) conducted a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment of the property in October of 2013, followed by Phase II soil and groundwater investigation activities in April of 2014. Based upon the findings of these initial site characterization efforts, OSE performed a supplemental site investigation in October/November of 2015. The total body of environmental data collected to date – representing over one-hundred (100) soil samples, three (3) groundwater samples, and the results of an electromagnetic survey – was compiled in a *Comprehensive Site Investigation Report (CSIR)* which was shared with the NPS and IHPA in February of 2016. The CSIR documented the sampling methodologies and analytical results of all soil and groundwater samples collected at the site, as well as magnetic anomalies in two (2) separate locations that may be indicative of abandoned/buried underground storage tanks.

The Pullman property was enrolled in the State Voluntary Cleanup Program (*aka the Site Remediation Program, or SRP*) in September of 2015.

The ultimate goal of the project is to issue a Comprehensive No Further Remediation (NFR) letter to IHPA for the Pullman parcel through the SRP Program.

The site is currently used for public programs or activities including historic tours, lectures, seminars, urban gardening, Frisbee golf and beekeeping. Parts

of the historic building(s) have already been renovated, with plans for a Visitor's Center following environmental cleanup of the Site.

