

Chicago's Belden-Stratford Hotel

A new type of apartment hotel was introduced in Chicago around 1915. Geared towards middle-class tenants, these facilities generally accommodated both short- and longer-term residents. With small units in attractive buildings, apartment hotels provided many Chicagoans of modest means the opportunity to live in desirable neighborhoods that they might not have otherwise been able to afford. Most, though not all, facilities of this type included small kitchenettes.

They also often had a café or restaurant so that tenants wouldn't have to do their own cooking. Apartment hotels offered an array of amenities such as maid, laundry, and concierge services; telephones in every suite; and billiard and smoking parlors, restaurants, and shops—all at affordable prices.

Often built near parks, apartment hotels were especially popular in areas along the lakefront. Dozens of them opened in Uptown, a vibrant community with restaurants, entertainment venues, private beaches, and Clarendon Beach, a new municipal beach that could accommodate as many as 9,000 bathers per day.

The prosperity of the 1920s spurred the development of spacious luxury rental and co-operative apartment buildings that catered to Chicago's elite. As greater numbers of these impressive structures rose along the lakefront and in other exclusive residential neighborhoods, lavishly-appointed apartment hotels were often developed in these same areas. One example near Lincoln Park was the 1923 Belden-Stratford, shown below.

With a \$4 million construction budget, the project led to one of the North Side's most elegant buildings. It was produced by Meyer Fridstein, an architect who had previously worked for Marshall & Fox, the city's

premier designer of luxury apartments and hotels. Fridstein gave the Belden Stratford a distinctly French flair by capping the structure with a prominent mansard roof. The exterior opulence is carried through the building's fine interior public spaces, though the units themselves are quite simple.

The structure was built in the 1920s and renovated between 1989 and 1990. Notable guests over the years included Louis Armstrong and Gloria Swanson. *[Wikipedia]*

