



Frankfort Area Historical Society of Will County, Illinois

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On the corner of Kansas and Ash

On the corner of Ash and Kansas once stood Frankfort's "first department store."

Balchowsky's sold almost anything one needed from 1877 – 1926. Today, many small shops: *Bentley's Pet Stuff, Briosia Boutique, Flawless Skin Studio, Grounded Coffee Bar, Lorin's Luxe, Frankfort Bowl, Azul Boutique*, and *Tis the Seasons* keep the mercantile tradition of the building, now called "Old Frankfort Mall," alive. The legacy of Balchowsky's lives on.

Balchowsky's

Born in Rus, Poland about 1847, Bernard Balchowsky came to Frankfort after the Chicago fire. Carrying a backpack, he sold wares from house to house beginning his local business. He soon expanded with a red delivery wagon led by "George," a well-known white horse. Upon "George's" retirement, the business was the first in the area to deliver by auto truck. Before paved roads and automobiles, mail order catalogs were the main competition for local stores. Bernard Balchowsky aimed to expand his services to challenge that.

In 1877, "Barney" rented a store and set up his business on site. A two-story wood frame was built on Ash Street in 1880, joined in 1903 by a two-story brick structure. Along with sons Charles, Mose, and Harry, the business incorporated as B. Balchowsky and Sons until 1926. For many, it was like a "little Sears and Roebuck!"



Ada Lambrecht (former resident and local historian) reminisced in 1955: *The north wing was devoted to dry goods, men's and boy's clothing and a cashier cage at the back. Upstairs were a variety of stoves, dishes, crockery, tinware, and kitchen utensils. The aroma of freshly ground coffee, herbs and spices, open kegs of herring and barrels of crackers and peanuts permeated the main floor of the older*

At the turn of the century, Constable Knippel had the dual job of law enforcement officer and lamp-lighter. Each evening just before dark, he would make his rounds lowering each lamp, lighting it, then raising it back into position. The lamps were hung on pulleys over the intersections. To conserve on tax payers' money, he would make the rounds once again at 1:00 a.m. and turn out all of the lamps.