Prior to 1892 there were smaller four and five digit telephone numbers that would have been used. From 1892 to 1921, one would have placed a call by telling the operator the name of the exchange, followed by the callee's specific number. For example, present day (773) 525-0421 would have been Lake View 421. In 1921, this was changed to a 3 letter – 4 digit system.

The example number becomes LAK-0421. This was cut back to 2 letters -5 digits (2L-5D) in 1948, lasting officially until 1977.

Area codes were introduced in 1947; however, the issue does not become confusing in Chicago until 1996. Our number in 1948 became (312) LA5-0421. 2L-5D is the variety that remains...if you look at old advertising or ghost signage.

Exchange prefixes were not necessarily based on a logical location. There were some common ones recycled from city to city. However, some do refer to local landmarks.