

ORDINANCE

WHEREAS, William Friedkin was an American film and television director, producer and screenwriter best known for his crime thriller, The French Connection, and the horror film, The Exorcist.

WHEREAS, William Friedkin won five Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director.

WHEREAS, William Friedkin proudly came from humble beginnings, born and raised in Chicago by Jewish immigrant parents, and starting his professional career in the WGN mail room.

WHEREAS, William Friedkin attended Chicago Public Schools, graduating from Nicholas Senn High School in Edgewater in 1953, where he played basketball.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF CHICAGO:

Section 1: Pursuant to an ordinance heretofore passed by the City Council which allows erection of honorary street-name signs, the Commissioner of Transportation shall take the necessary action for standardization of 5855 to 5920 N Ridge as “William Friedkin Way.”

Section 2: This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and publication.

Leni Manaa-Hoppenworth
Alderwoman, 48th Ward

Biography

BY LINDSEY BAHR

Updated 9:23 AM CDT, August 8, 2023

LOS ANGELES (AP) — William Friedkin, the generation-defining director who brought a visceral realism to 1970s hits “The French Connection” and “The Exorcist” and was quickly anointed one of [Hollywood’s top directors](#) when he was only in his 30s, has died. He was 87.

Friedkin, who won the [best director Oscar](#) for “The French Connection,” died Monday in Los Angeles, Marcia Franklin, his executive assistant for 24 years, told The Associated Press on behalf of his family and wife, former [studio head Sherry Lansing](#). His son Cedric Friedkin told the AP he died after a long illness.

“He was role model to me and to (my brother) Jack,” Cedric Friedkin said. “He was a massive inspiration.”

He cemented his legacy early with “The French Connection,” which was [based on a true story](#) and deals with the efforts of maverick New York City police Detective James “Popeye” Doyle to track down Frenchman Alain Charnier, mastermind of a large drug pipeline funneling heroin into the United States.

It contains one of the most thrilling chase scenes ever filmed: Doyle, played by [Gene Hackman](#) in an Oscar-winning performance, barely misses making the arrest on a subway train, then stops a passing car to follow the train as it emerges on an elevated railway. He races underneath, dodging cars, trucks and pedestrians, including a woman pushing a baby buggy, before catching up to one of Rey’s henchmen and shooting him.

The movie, which was made for only \$2 million, became a box office hit when it was released in 1971. It won Academy Awards for best picture, screenplay and film editing, and led critics to hail Friedkin, then just 32, as a leading member of a new generation of filmmakers.

He followed with an even bigger blockbuster, “The Exorcist,” released in 1973 and based on [William Peter Blatty’s](#) bestselling novel about a 12-year-old girl possessed by the devil.

The harrowing scenes of the girl’s possession and a splendid cast, including Linda Blair as the girl, [Ellen Burstyn](#) as her mother and [Max Von Sydow](#) and Jason Miller as the priests who try to exorcise the devil,

helped make the film a box-office sensation. It was so scary for its era that many viewers fled the theater before it was over and some reported being unable to sleep for days afterward.

“The Exorcist” received 10 Oscar nominations, including one for Friedkin as director, and won two, for Blatty’s script and for sound.

With that second success, Friedkin would go on to direct movies and TV shows well into the 21st century. But he would never again come close to matching the acclaim he’d received for those early works, and gained a reputation for clashing with both actors and studio executives.

“I embody arrogance, insecurity and ambition that spur me on as they hold me back,” he wrote in his 2012 memoir.

His 1977 film “Sorcerer,” a gangster thriller starring Roy Scheider was widely panned at the time and also failed with audiences. It’s since been reappraised by critics and has become a cult classic that Friedkin himself would continue to defend. In 2017, he told IndieWire that it’s the only of his films that he could still watch.

“The zeitgeist had changed by the time it came out,” he said in 2013. “It came out at the time of ‘Star Wars,’ and that more than any film that I can recall really captured the zeitgeist.”

“Star Wars” was a film he was approached to produce, but he said later that he couldn’t see its potential. He also turned down “M(a)S(H)” for the same reason.

Francis Ford Coppola praised Friedkin in a statement, saying his films “are alive with his genius.

“Pick any of them out of a hat and you’ll be dazzled. His lovable, irascible personality was cover for a beautiful, brilliant, deep-feeling giant of a man. It’s very hard to grasp that I will never enjoy his company again, but his work will at least stand in for him,” Coppola’s statement said.

A few years after “Sorcerer” brought him back to Earth, he followed with another disappointment:

“Cruising,” starring [Al Pacino](#) as a cop who goes undercover to solve the grisly murders of several gay men. It was protested by gay rights activists for how it depicted homosexuality.

Other film credits included “To Live and Die in L.A.,” “Rules of Engagement” and a TV remake of the classic play and Sidney Lumet movie “12 Angry Men.” Friedkin also directed episodes for such TV shows as “The Twilight Zone,” “Rebel Highway” and “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation.”

Born in Chicago on Aug. 29, 1935, he began working in local TV productions as a teenager. By age 16, he was directing live shows.

“My main influence was dramatic radio when I was a kid,” he said in a 2001 interview. “I remember listening to it in the dark, Everything was left to the imagination. It was just sound. I think of the sounds first and then the images.”

He moved from live shows to documentaries, making “The People Versus Paul Crump,” in 1962. It was the story of a prison inmate who rehabilitates himself on Death Row after being sentenced for the murder of a guard during a botched robbery at a Chicago food plant.

Producer David Wolper was so impressed with it that he brought Friedkin to Hollywood to direct network TV shows.

After working on such shows as “The Bold Ones,” “The Alfred Hitchcock Hour” and the documentary “The Thin Blue Line,” Friedkin landed his first film, 1967’s “Good Times.” It was a lighthearted musical romp headlined by the pop duo Sonny and Cher in what would be their only movie appearance together.

He followed that with “The Night They Raided Minsky’s,” about backstage life at a burlesque theater, and “The Birthday Party,” from a Harold Pinter play. He then gained critical attention with 1970’s “The Boys in the Band,” a landmark film about gay men.

Author and film historian Mark Harris wrote on social media that, “Not many directors can say they made a gay movie that people argue about decades later. William Friedkin made two: Boys in the Band (I like it, many don’t) and Cruising (I don’t like it, many do). That’s not nothing.”

Friedkin had three brief marriages in the 1970s and ’80s, to French actress [Jeanne Moreau](#); British actress Lesley-Anne Down, with whom he had a son; and longtime Los Angeles TV news anchor Kelly Lange. In 1991, he married Paramount studio executive Lansing.

In recent years, Friedkin wrote a candid memoir, “The Friedkin Connection,” and directed several well-received movies adapted from [Tracy Letts plays](#) including “Bug” and “Killer Joe,” starring Matthew McConaughey as a hit man. And he wasn’t done working yet: A new film, “The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial,” starring Kiefer Sutherland, is set to premiere [at the Venice Film Festival](#) next month.

He was also always willing to reflect on his rollercoaster career, especially as “The French Connection” celebrated its 50th anniversary. Thinking back to the iconic car chase sequence, Friedkin told NBC News in 2021 that it was legitimately life-threatening and that he’d never do it again.

“Everything you see, we actually did. There was no CGI then. There was no way to fake it. I just put the pedal to the metal, and we went 90 miles an hour in city traffic,” he said. “The fact that nobody got hurt is a miracle. The fact that I didn’t get killed, the fact that some of the crew members didn’t get hurt or killed. That’s a chance I would never take again. I was young and I didn’t give a damn. I just went out and did it. I set out to make a great chase scene and I didn’t care about the consequences, and now I do.”

Friedkin’s influence on film and popular culture continues to live on too. A new “Exorcist” film is even coming out this year, from director [David Gordon Green](#), with Burstyn reprising her role.

Friedkin said he never got too worried about what the critics were saying over the years.

“I really don’t live by what the critics write, although I was aware of the critical reception of all of my films,” he reflected in 2013. “My own take on the films I’ve made is based on what I achieved versus what I set out to do.”

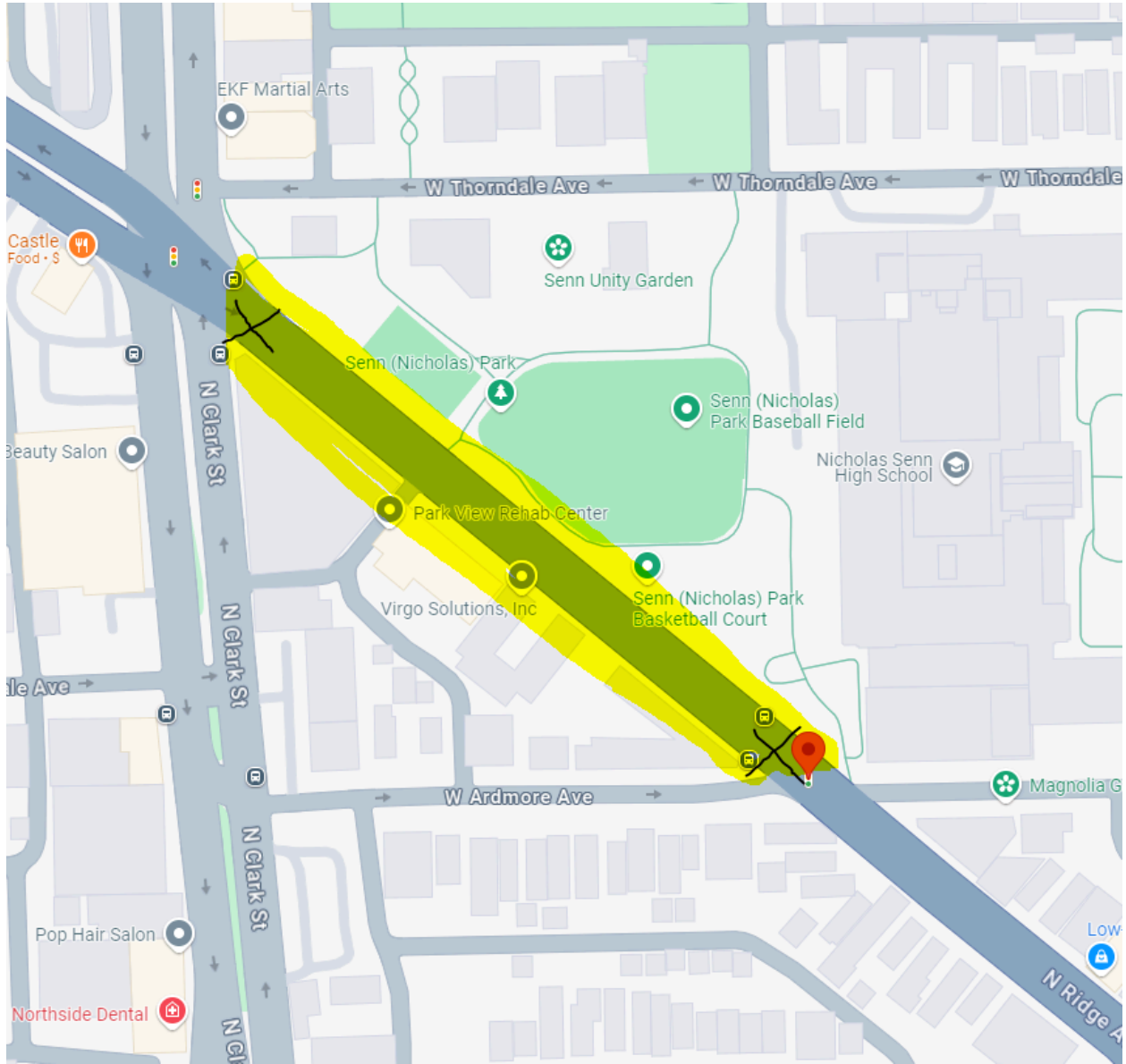
The late Associated Press correspondent Bob Thomas contributed significant biographical material to this obituary. National Writer Hillel Italie contributed from New York.

This story was first published Aug. 7, 2023. It was updated on Aug. 8, 2023, to correct the year Friedkin was born to 1935.

Reason for honoring

William Friedkin was an American film and television director, producer and screenwriter best known for his crime thriller, *The French Connection*, and the horror film, *The Exorcist*. He won five Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director. William Friedkin proudly came from humble beginnings, born and raised in Chicago by Jewish immigrant parents, and starting his professional career in the WGN mail room. He attended Chicago Public Schools, graduating from Nicholas Senn High School in Edgewater in 1953, where he played basketball.

Map



Date: [April 1, 2024](#)

Office of Budget and Management
121 N. LaSalle, Room 604
Chicago, IL 60602

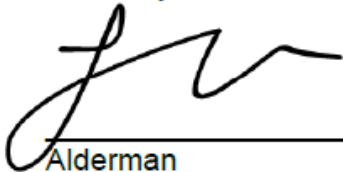
To Whom It May Concern:

I, [Leni Manaa-Hoppenworth](#), Alderman of the [48th](#) Ward, hereby authorize the Office of Budget Management to withdraw the funds associated with the cost of installation for this honorary street designation for [William Friedkin](#) from my:

- Ward's annual menu program budget
- Ward's aldermanic expense allowance

upon passage of this designation ordinance, pursuant to Section 2-8-040 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

Sincerely,



Alderman