The Village of Bay View was platted by the Milwaukee Iron Company on January 12, 1867 to provide a town site for its workers. Built initially to produce steel rails for railroads, the newly created Milwaukee Iron Company occupied 27 ½ acres of property while 76 ½ acres were reserved for building lots for the workers who would soon be employed at the mill. The mammoth plant was put into operation in 1868. An addition to the original plat was made in 1870. The plat laid out generous lots that were 50 by 100 feet in dimension with some odd shaped parcels resulting from the convergence of streets that did not follow the original grid. By March of 1868 the newspapers reported that 25 buildings had been erected. By 1870 there were 88 dwellings. Street names originally reflected the Great Lakes (Erie, Superior, Huron, etc.) and the names of some of the early pioneer landholders and developers (Estes, Pryor, etc.).

South Shore Drive was laid out in the original village plat. It has been renamed a number of times: Erie Street, Lake Avenue, Beulah Avenue and then S. Shore Drive. South Shore Drive is characterized by single-family dwellings with some duplexes built in the 20th century, one apartment building and several multi-family condos built within the latter part of the 20th century. The housing stock varies along the street and includes the prominent houses of the Milwaukee Iron Company officials and managers along with the more modest “puddlers cottages” of the mill workers. While this street tended to attract the most prosperous of the company officials, the presence of the workers housing is very much in keeping with development patterns of the mid-nineteenth century. The Brewers Hill Historic District and the Walkers Point Historic District, evolving at the same time within the city limits of Milwaukee, show the same pattern of well-to-do dwellings built next to workers housing. The economic stratification of neighborhoods came later, starting in the 1890s, but Bay View did not follow this pattern to any large degree. The closest Bay View came to an “exclusive” neighborhood can be seen in the southernmost blocks of S. Superior Street near Oklahoma Avenue.

Due to intact nature of the area, nineteen blocks that formed the core of original village, as well as South Shore Park, were listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 8, 1982. Property owners can avail themselves of the Historic Tax Credit as a result of this listing.

Most of the housing stock along South Shore Drive consists of low rise, one-story, two-story, or two-and-one half story structures. For the most part, houses feature gabled roofs with the front gable facing the street. Many of the houses have front porches. A number of the puddlers cottages have a shallow side wing, set back from the front of the house, making them L-plan in shape. Many of the larger houses are L-plan in form as well.
Ancillary structures like garages are located behind the houses on the east side of the street and approached through side drives. Houses on the west side of the street are serviced by a rear alley and there are no curb cuts for driveways. Development along South Shore Drive occurred over a long period of time with the original clusters of houses from the 1870s, followed by some houses from the 1880s. Later, single family houses/bungalows and duplexes that filled in vacant lots in the teens and 1920s. Another spurt of development occurred in the late 20th century with the demolition of existing houses and the construction of multi-unit condos. Houses addressed between No. 2751 and No. 2975 front on the north portion of South Shore Park, created in 1909.

The majority of the houses on South Shore Drive are of frame construction. In the 2500 block, characterized by many 1870s houses from the village’s first period of settlement, there is one masonry duplex at No. 2568-70 (1938) and one ranch house with a brick veneered base at No. 2596 (1964) as well as the 25-story condominium tower at No. 2525 (1964) at the very north end of the street.

In the 2600 block masonry houses can be found at No. 2625 (1920) and No. 2629 (1928).

The preponderance of frame houses continues in the 2700 block where 20 houses out of 29 have clapboard or wood siding. Masonry buildings include: a condo development at No 2700-06 (1987) that has living units over raised masonry garages; a 5-unit condo building at No. 2701 (1978) also addressed at 1923-31 E. Iron Street; a stucco clad dwelling at No 2719 (1917); a brick bungalow at No. 2730 (1925); a masonry apartment building at No. 2745 (1960); a Tudor style house at No. 2750 (1928); a remodeling of an existing house at No. 2751 (1928); an Arts and Crafts duplex with stucco clad lower story at No. 2771-73 (1916); and a brick Dutch Colonial Revival at No. 2777-79 (1951).

Lot sizes along South Shore Drive conform to the original plat for the most part with a number of properties on the east side of the street having deeper lots with frontage on Lake Michigan. These deeper lots led to the construction of four rear houses and some split lots such as at the northeast corner South Shore Drive and E. Iron Street and the northeast corner of South Shore Drive and E. Nock Street. Fire insurance maps confirm that today’s South Shore Drive has not changed much from the late 19th century. There was not the density or overloading of lots with one or more rear houses or structures as seen in other Milwaukee neighborhoods.

The earliest houses on South Shore Drive date from the early 1870s and are a preservation priority as they represent the original village settlement and form the core buildings that resulted in the National Register listing. They include:

- No. 2540 (c.1870) John Judge owner
- No. 2544 (c. 1871, enlarged 1910) George Edmunds owner (foreman of the puddle mills)
- No. 2550 (1873) George Edmunds owner
- No. 2556 (1872-1873) Noah Bird owner
- No. 2557 (1872) James McAneny owner (puddler)
No. 2564 (1872) E.J. Bird owner
No. 2565 (1873) Patrick Madden owner (occupation puddler)
No. 2574-76 (c. 1872-1874) Francis Skelving owner
No. 2575 (1873-1874) D. B. Fowler/Henry Llewellyn owner
No. 2581 (1876) Henry Durand owner watchman
No. 2582 (1872) George Starkey owner
No. 2638 (1877)
No. 2642 (1877)
No. 2645 (1876) Louis Schildknecht owner
No. 2646 (1873)
No. 2711 (1873) Royal Oliver owner
No. 2731 (1873) C. Merr owner