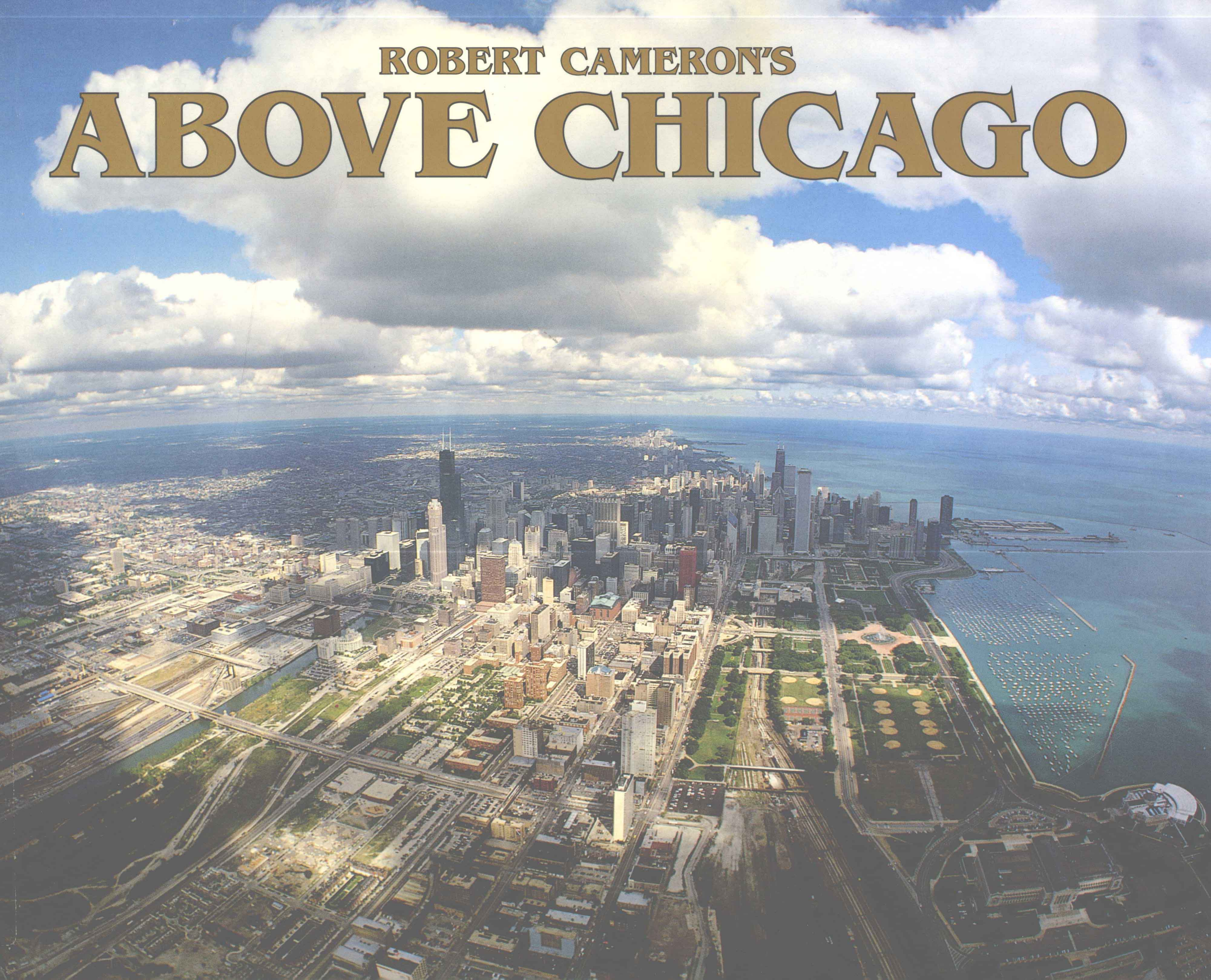
ROBERT CAMERON'S

ABOVE CHICAGO



ABOVE CHICAGO

by ROBERT CAMERON

A new collection of historical and original
aerial photographs of Chicago

CAMERON and COMPANY, San Francisco, California

Such a book as this does not reach publication without more than the usual cooperation
from many people. So, for their encouragement and expertise, I thank the following:

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(Caption for page 7) There's no mistaking it. This is Chicago. Seen across the low-rise, hardworking West Side, the legendary skyscrapers of downtown rise up from the flat midwestern plain. Chicago has always been famous for building tall. It has erected the world's tallest building twice. The current champion is Sears Tower. Some say Chicago has built big in order to invent a landscape where there was none. But maybe they weren't taking into account the extreme and changing beauty of Lake Michigan which composes the city's backdrop.

INTRODUCTION

I was born and raised in the Midwest. Where I grew up, everyone thought of Chicago as our big town. It meant excitement to me. It still does.

Ah, those trips to Chicago! My parents took me to the city when I was a boy. By the 1930s, when I was making my own decisions, I went back – for the music and the friends I had made there. Chicago was a world center for jazz then, which had travelled up the river from New Orleans and I was just the right age to be mesmerized by it. Earl Hines was at the Grand Terrace. Roy Eldridge was at the Three Deuces. Benny Goodman was at the Congress introducing swing to Chicago. And Louis Armstrong was everywhere. I was also at the right age to marry and get a job in the photography department of the *Des Moines Register.* Thus began my career in photography, which, happily, is not quite over.

Chicago's charms still hold me. It is, in many circles, considered to be the most architecturally distinguished city in the world – a fact that will be impressed upon anyone turning the pages of this book. But let me reminisce for a moment and allow the text to speak for itself.

I have been in love with photography ever since my father taught me how to ignite flash powder at the age of ten. When I started at the *Des Moines Register,* I was a darkroom rat. Eventually, I was elevated to news photographer. By that time, the flashbulb – filled with aluminum foil – had been invented. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. When it didn't, it exploded in the subject's face.

During World War II, I worked as a photographer for the War Department. I was 4-F, so I worked as a civilian, photographing army camps and installations in the United States. I did my first significant aerial work during the War. Those shots may not have been as good as the ones in this book, but I was hooked.

After the War, I thought of becoming a professional aerial photographer, but there were lots of us by then. Uncle Sam had produced thousands of aerial photographers who had experience like mine. By then I had a family to raise, so I built a business of my own in New York and made photography my hobby instead. It wasn't until the late 1960s, when helicopters had been perfected, that I came back to photography full-time when I moved my family to San Francisco. I started a new business – a publishing company. My first book was *Above San Francisco,* and it set a model for all books that followed. Since then I've done a dozen more, from Hawaii to Paris.

In making those books, I have tried every aerial device except hang gliders. I have flown and photographed from blimps (stable but clumsy), gliders (cramped), balloons (noisy and capricious), and fixed-wing planes. Helicopters are best and safest. With a good pilot, I can frame a shot while he hovers. Fixed high-wing planes are second best, but you have to grab shots and make another pass if you don't get what you want on the first try. I even photographed Yosemite through the windshield of a Falcon Jet at 45,000 feet. I lost some definition, but you can't take the door off up there.

Anyone who has ever flown knows that cities look completely different from the air. Not only is there a change in perspective, there is a change in relationships. It is always surprising to see, for example, that one's house has *this* geographical relationship to *that* shopping center, and not the one we have in our mind's eye when we're on the ground in our car. There is something else – less tangible. Airborne, man undergoes a subtle shift in values. What is important and significant on the ground seems strangely irrelevant a mile up, and what seemed like folly or even madness takes on some of the qualities of poetry when you're flying. My camera lens lets people experience their city in a new way.

When I started aerial photography, I used a Speed Graphic camera, which, under ideal circumstances, can be used at one-one-thousandth of a second. The Speed Graphic was a standard old news photographer's camera. It's still used to some extent. Then I used a 4x5 Linhof aerial camera, a format I still resort to in some situations. Ansel Adams tried to convert me to the Hasselblad, but I don't like square pictures – except his, of course. I generally use a 6x7 centimeter format; I have several of these cameras made by Pentax. And I use six lenses ranging from the fisheye to the four-hundred millimeter.

But the most important piece of equipment to my work is the Kenyon gyrostabilizer, which defeats vibration. To film or photograph from the air, most cinematographers use a mount which is part of the helicopter. The mount makes the equipment steady. My method is a little different. I always work with a hand-held camera and the gyrostabilizer attached to it. The gyrostabilizer is the shape of a large egg and weighs about ten pounds. It is sealed; inside, two gyros are whirling in a vacuum about two inches in diameter. One is whirling vertically, the other horizontally. They counterbalance each other. After about eight minutes on a six-volt battery, the gyros build up to 22,000 rpm. At this speed the gyrostabilizer becomes a thing in itself, unaffected by outside movement. It has its own mind, separate from the gravity of the earth and vibration. It holds the camera steady so I can get the shots I want without worrying about the movement of the helicopter.

When I take a photograph, I am held in the helicopter by a harness. I sometimes must lean out of the aircraft. It is a sight that startles some people. When I was working on a book on Yosemite, I photographed three climbers halfway up the face of El Capitan. Now, you must understand, a good climber takes three days to get to the top of El Capitan. It is 3,000 feet high and presents a nearly sheer face. I was happy with the picture I took, and a few days later my pilot introduced me to the climbers when we happened to run into them back on the ground. One of them said to me, "Oh, were you the guy hanging out of a helicopter taking pictures of us? I wouldn't do that for all the tea in China."

I have had extraordinary moments in working on each book I have done. Not all of them have been triumphs. In Hawaii, I spent day after day flying over a volcano, watching it erupt and waiting for dark. Each night, the lava flow would stop as soon as night fell. I waited until my printers refused to hold the press any longer. Although I did get some good ones, I never got exactly the shot I wanted.

In Paris, I was told no one could fly within the Peripherique, Paris's belt parkway. What would my book be without central Paris? It took the intervention of Pierre Salinger with President François Mitterrand before I could fly within the Peripherique. My pilot didn't know where the buildings I wanted to photograph were. "How could I know," he asked, "I never have a chance to fly inside of Paris." There were many frustrating days in Paris, but finally, I made some of the best photographs I ever have, and, in my prints, I got the beautiful soft French light Monet and other Impressionists celebrated.

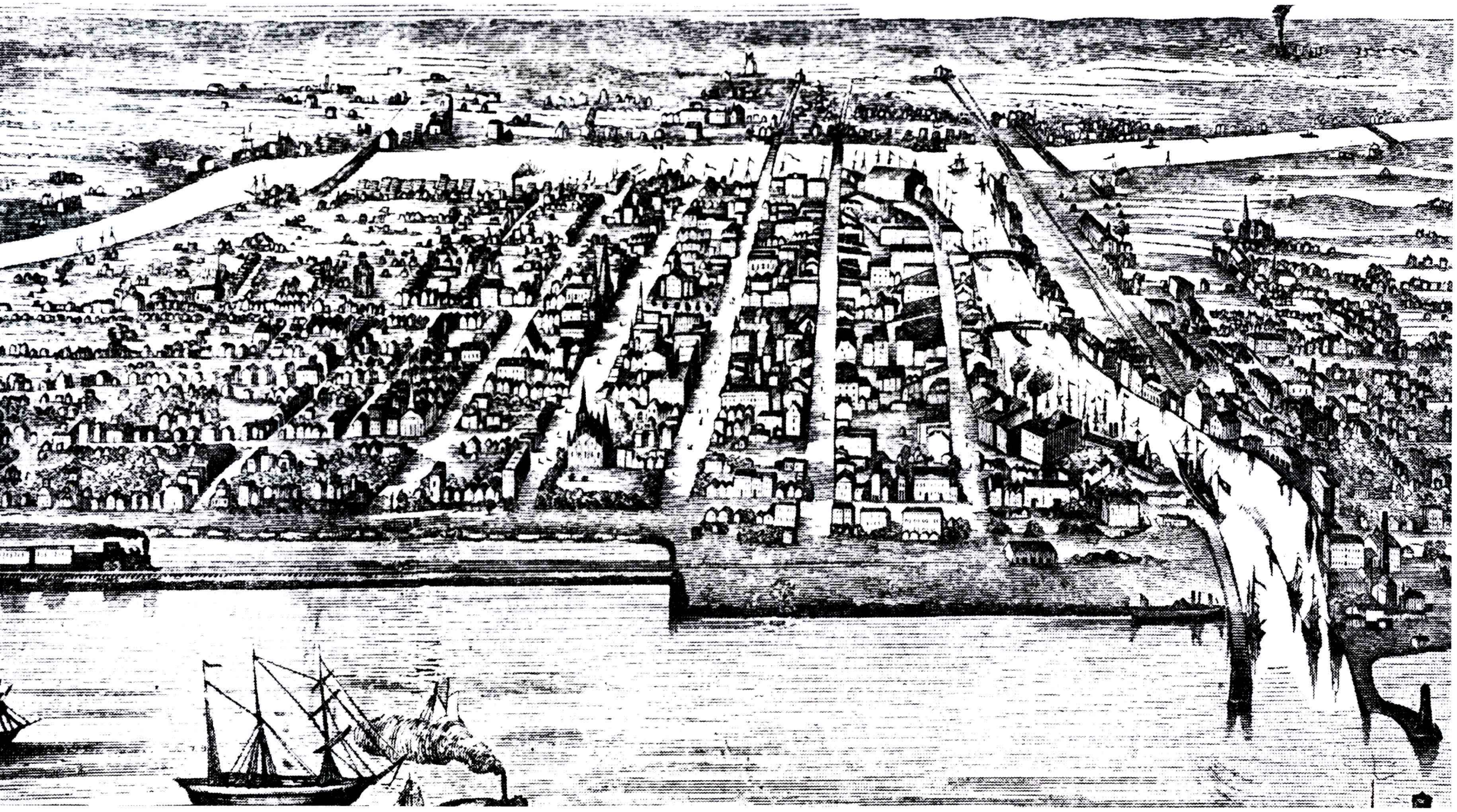
But Chicago has a light all its own!

I tried to do the impossible, covering the city in 153 pages. There's no way to do that, so I gave you a sampling, an evocative series of pictures of a world-class city. I think the beauty of this lakefront metropolis takes on a new meaning from the air. What becomes clear flying above it is that Chicago extends far beyond the political boundaries that technically define it. And the natural mother of the whole area is Lake Michigan.

We are living in a period of great transition. Man seems eager, and possibly able, to expand his view of himself and the dwelling places he has built, to include the earth and the universe. From above, the city landmarks take their place within the larger whole, of which man is an interesting, inspirational, often bewildered, but – let's face it – microscopic part.

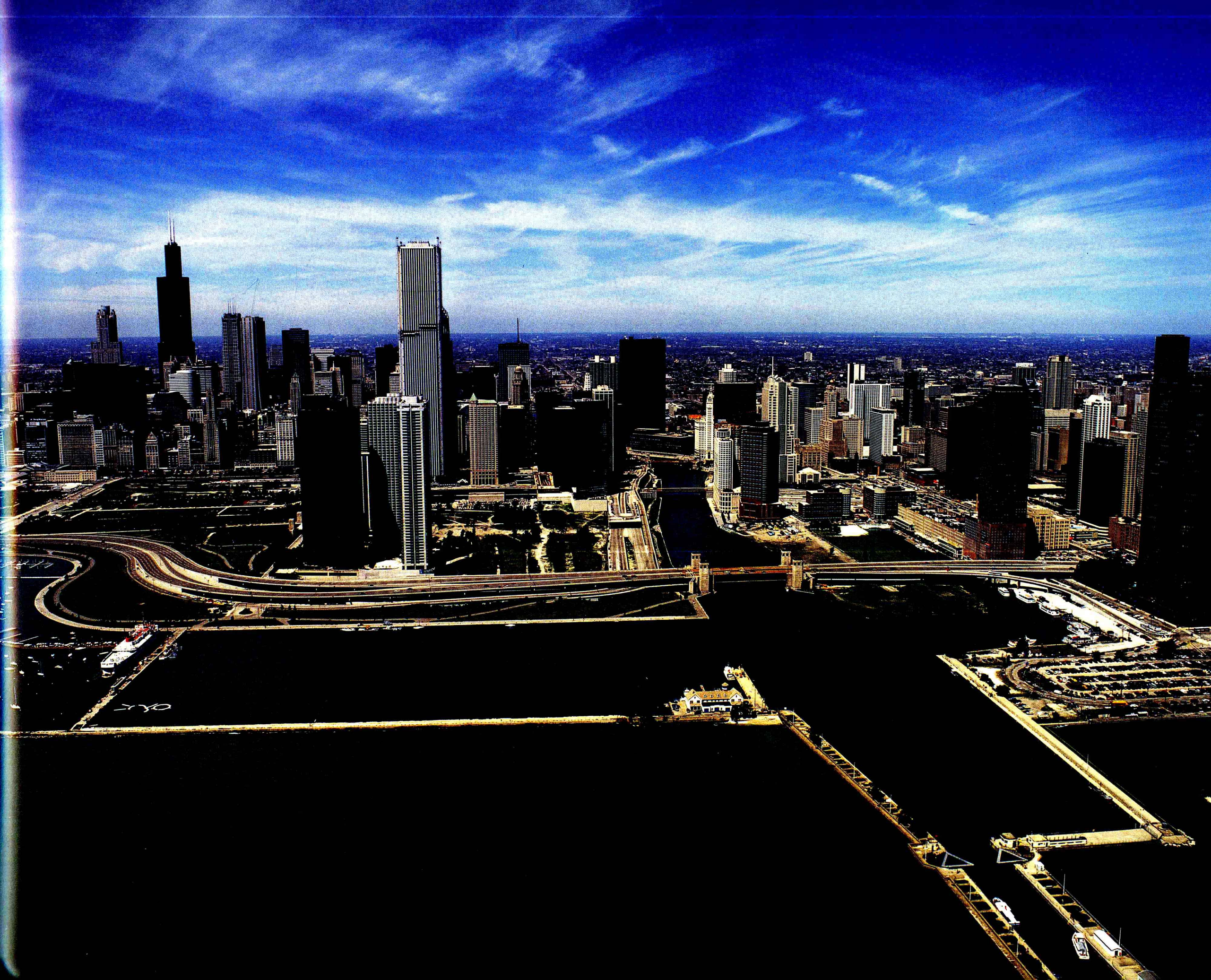
– R.C.

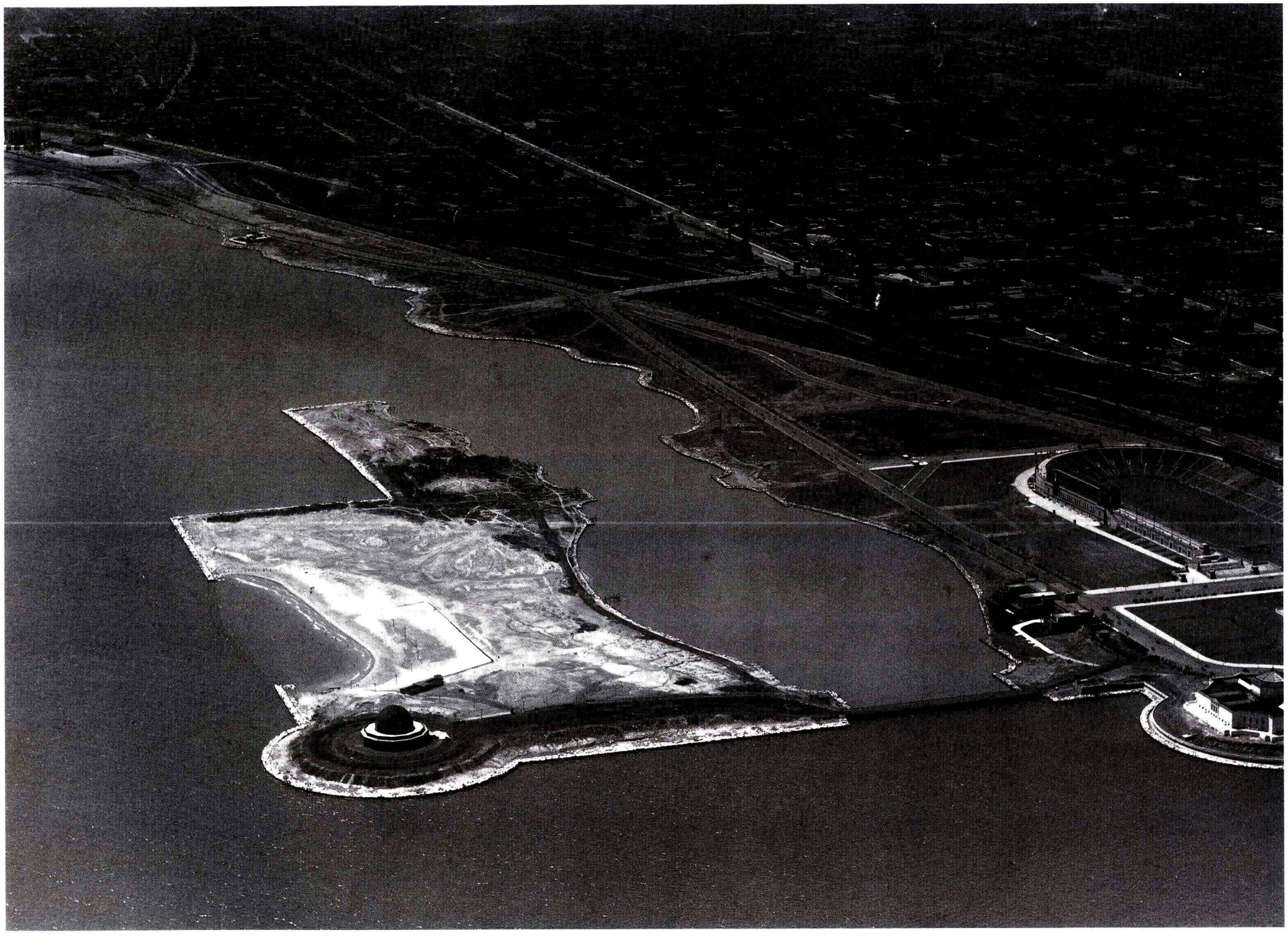
THE LAKE FRONT



This is where Chicago began, at the juncture of Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. From a population of less than fifty in the early 1830s, Chicago had grown to more than thirty-thousand by 1853 when this was drawn. To the left of the Chicago River is the relatively small area which was and remains the heart of the city's central business district. The River's role as commercial artery is demonstrated by the factories and warehouses shown lining its banks. The Illinois Central Railroad originally entered the city on an open trestle built in the lake. It was left high and dry by landfill and subsequent fills moved it further and further inland.

(Opposite) The confluence of the Chicago River and Lake Michigan hardly resembles what it was a century and a half ago. Once a brackish stand of water, the mouth of the River has been shifted east by landfill and reshaped by massive public works projects. Even the direction of the River has been changed, the result of an astounding engineering feat completed in 1900. By closing the river mouth with locks and digging deep diversion channels in outlying areas, the Chicago River's sewage-filled flow was shifted away from the city's drinking water source, Lake Michigan, to a course that eventually empties into the Mississippi River.



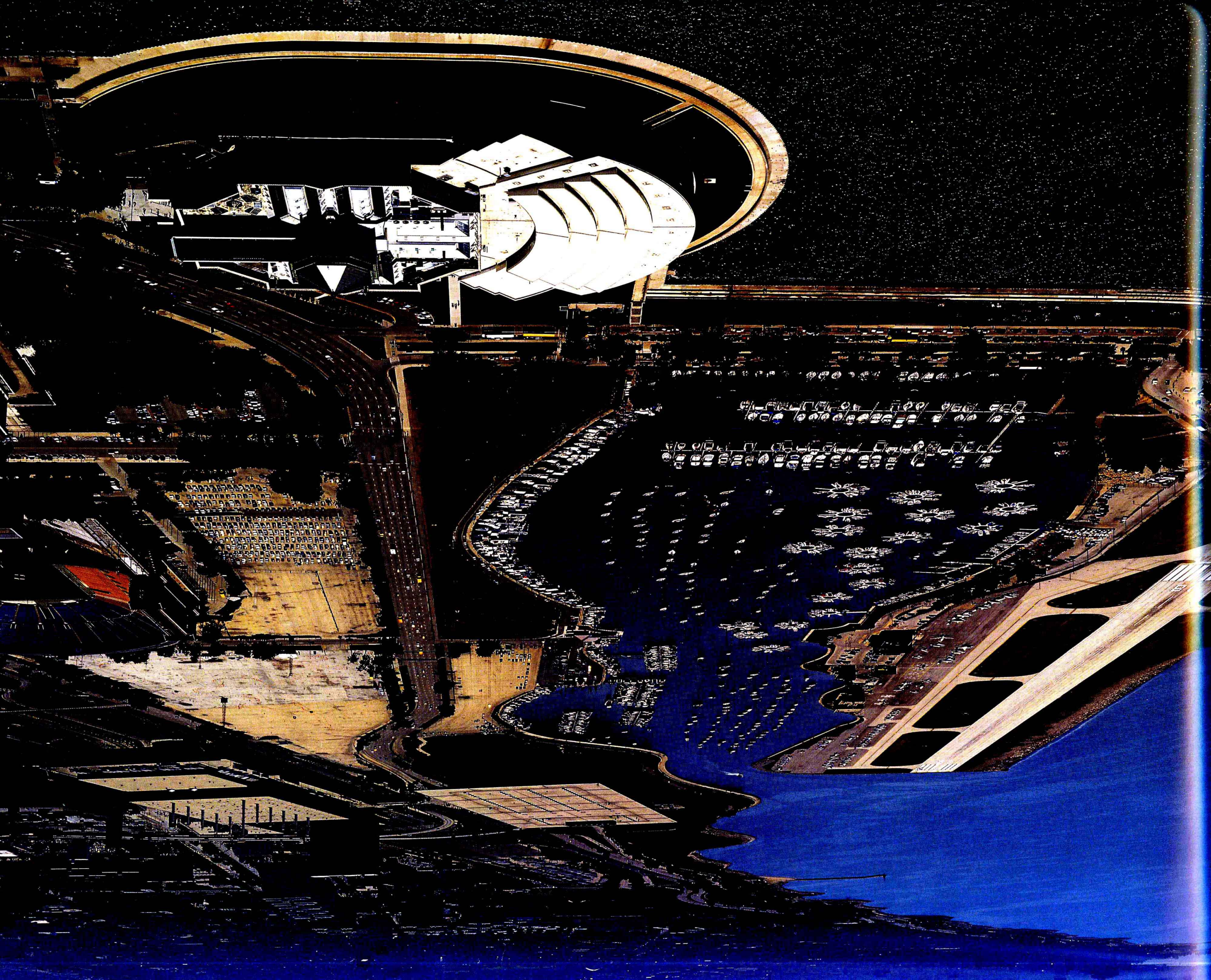


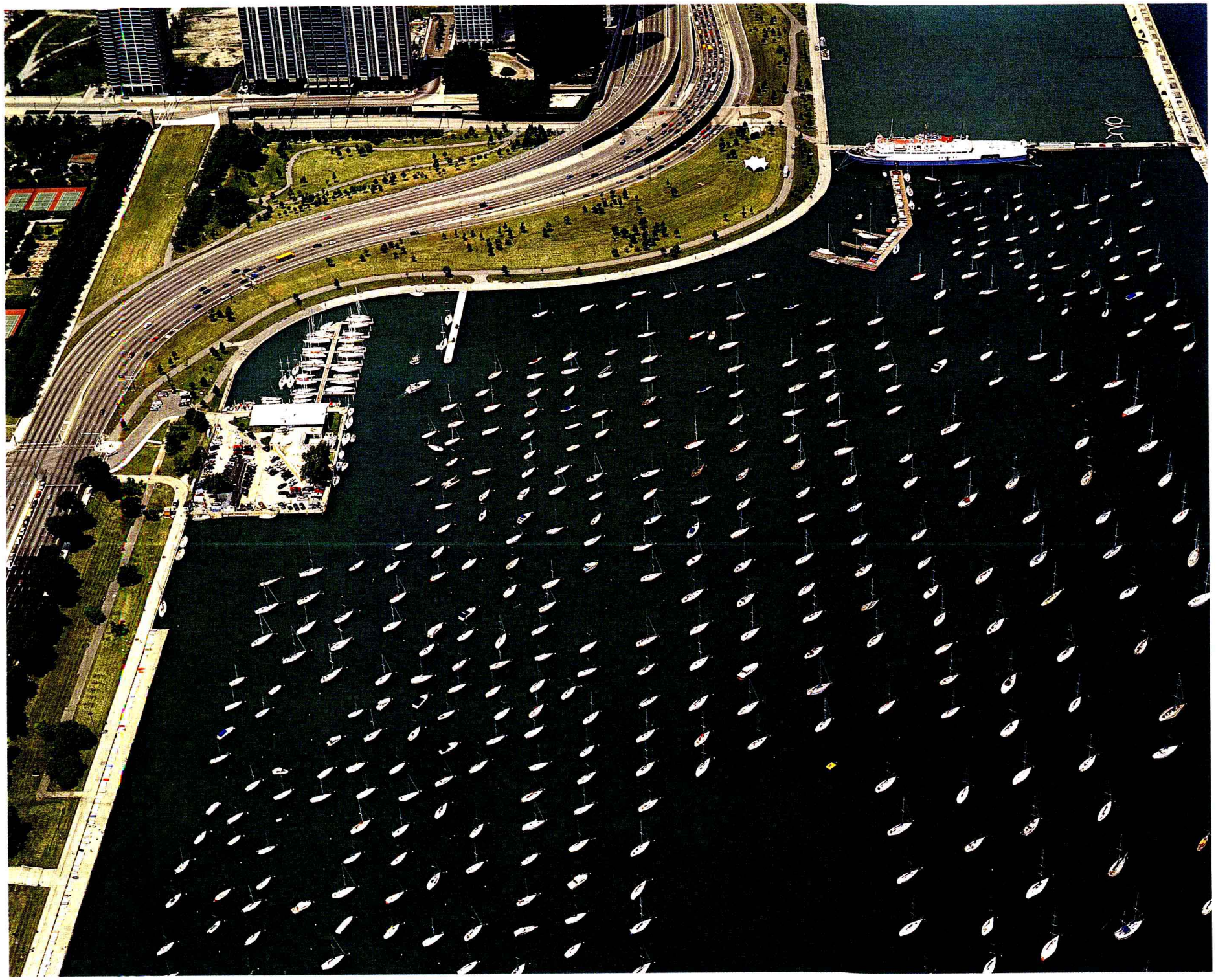
In 1909, architect and planner Daniel Hudson Burnham presented his visionary Plan of Chicago to civic leaders. Among his recommendations was the construction of outlying recreational islands along the south lakefront. One was eventually built and is shown in this photograph, taken in 1929 when the Adler Planetarium was under construction. Within a short time the Planetarium was joined by the temporary buildings and grounds of the 1933-1934 world's fair.

(Opposite) The location of the Adler Planetarium was in keeping with the Burnham Plan; the decision to use the rest of the island for Miegs Field municipal airport was not. Burnham imagined the lakefront reserved for public, recreational and cultural uses. Miegs is used primarily by private business aircraft, introducing a commercial – to say nothing of noisy – element. Additions to the Planetarium have been placed underground so as not to violate the building's elegant domed profile.

In defiance of the Depression, Chicago celebrated its centennial by hosting the world's fair in 1933 and 1934. It was optimistically called the Century of Progress Exposition and – ominous predictions of failure notwithstanding – it was a success. In spite of the hard times, people from around the country came to see the futuristic fairgrounds located on the city's near-south-side lakefront. The buildings were demolished after the fair closed, but the infrastructure was later used to construct Miegs Field airport.

(Opposite) Lake Michigan landfill makes an appropriate foundation for the aquarium. Named for its founder, the John G. Shedd Aquarium opened in 1929. The 1991 addition of the wavelike Oceanarium at the rear gives Chicagoans views of dolphins, whales and other saltwater natives. The meandering green lawns of Burnham Park extend southward along the lakeshore following Daniel Burnham's recommendations for a recreational lakefront. It is doubtful, however, that the placement of the McCormick Place convention center, seen in the distance, would have been approved by the park's namesake.





Downtown workers lucky enough to secure a mooring in Monroe Harbor need only walk across Grant Park to take an after-hours sail on Lake Michigan.

(Opposite) Flying north toward the central business district, the tall buildings of downtown Chicago stand grouped in splendid isolation, a graphic demonstration of the city's compact development. For over a century, the combination of heavy river traffic, tightly held industrial districts and railroads confined the downtown to a relatively small area south and east of the Chicago River. The demand for scarce real estate and downtown's inability to expand laterally gave birth to the skyscraper in the late-nineteenth century. With river traffic now virtually nonexistent and the relocation of railroads and industrial areas, downtown Chicago has started to move outside its traditional boundaries.

This late-1920s view shows Grant Park in an early stage with newly laid formal gardens and promenades. Lake Shore Drive – defined here by a border of wispy trees – was originally intended for leisurely drives and has become, instead, a race-way for commuters.

(Opposite) Grant Park is Chicago's front yard. Through hard-won legislation it has been kept free of buildings for more than a mile between Randolph Street and Roosevelt Road. An exception was made for the original 1892 Art Institute. Expansion of the museum has been permitted but only after close scrutiny by the city and nearby property owners. The park's grassy expanses mask its infrastructure which includes underground parking garages and the recessed tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad. A sure sign of summer's beginning and end is Buckingham Fountain's start-up and shut-down.